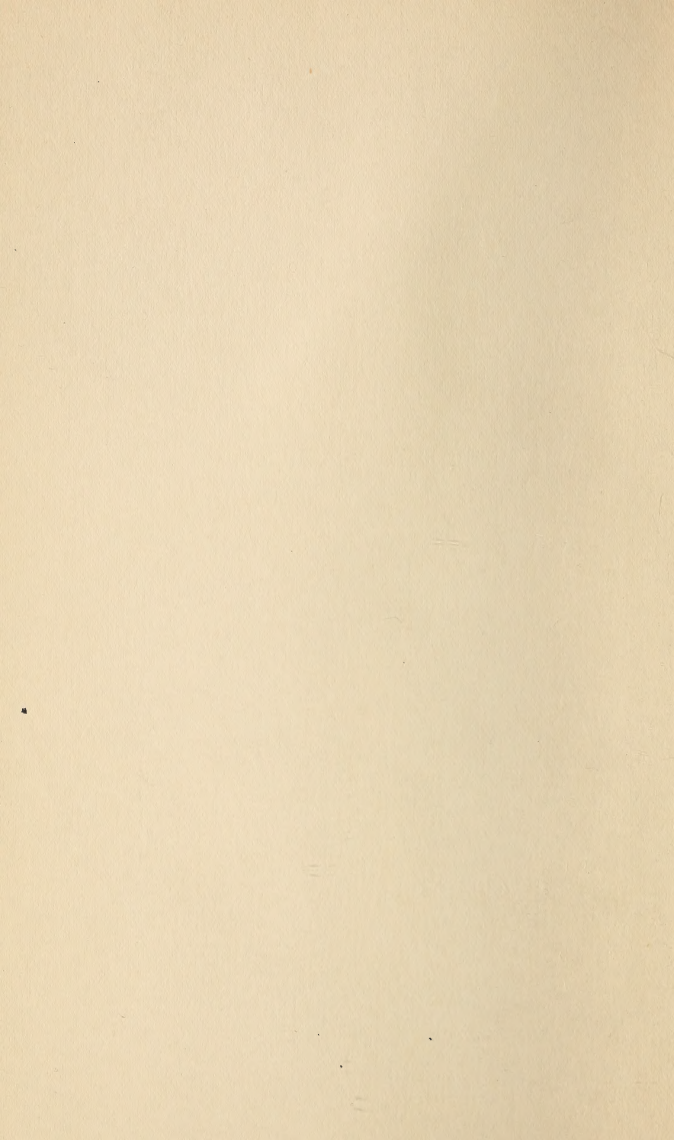


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THE HEBREW TRAGEDY



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THE HEBREW TRAGEDY

BY

COLONEL C. R. CONDER

R.E., LL.D., D.C.L., M.R.A.S.

AUTHOR OF 'THE BIBLE AND THE EAST,'
'THE HITTITES AND THEIR
LANGUAGE,' ETC.

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THE HERREW TRAGEDY

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THE HEBREW TRAGEDY.



I.

PATRIARCHS.

A BROAD grey river runs fast to the south, between white marl banks, under a dappled April sky. On either hand are plains with young grass and flowers. Across the river swings a rude raft, floated on goat-skins blown up with air; and on it sits the chief with his family—his wife and nephew. The long dark robe, the shining sword and spear, the gold arm-band, the olive skin, and black eyes and beard, betoken an Arab prince. The blue-gowned princess wears on her forehead the silver rings and pendants of her

dowry, and anklets of gold, bracelets of gold, and earrings set with gems contrast with the simple sweeping garb. The camels and asses, sheep and goats, are ferried over by slaves; the long black tent is spread on the Syrian fields, where the flocks and herds begin to pasture. And thus this little family have become Hebrews—they who have “come across” the Euphrates to explore a new land in the west.

What is it to us, four thousand years later, that such a crossing should be remembered? Many a tribe more powerful and numerous had crossed before. Amorites and Canaanites and pig-tailed Hittites had already passed over, and had settled in corn-plains or on the cool mountains of Lebanon. Even then they were driving their chariots to war, and carving the figures of winged gods—eagle-headed, lion-headed, or treading on the lion and the bull—out of the black basalt blocks for their temples. Kings of Babylon and of Elam had brought already their armies of horse and foot across Euphrates, had levied tribute as far as the Great Sea to the west and the desert to the south. They had

occupied the oliveyards and vineyards of a fruitful land, had cut down cedars in Lebanon, and had quarried granite in Sinai. The wanderings of an Arab family in such an age were of little account. They passed by walled cities and tillage, and sought out the flat plains, on the borders of settled lands, where wells must be dug, but where pasture for flocks could be found. Chronicles did not record their deeds, though tradition preserved their names and magnified their acts. You may hold in your hand to-day the very letters of brick which were written for Amraphel, in the days of his pride; but you will seek in vain for any records of Abraham. Mankind does not foresee what are the greatest events of the age, so silent and so small is the beginning of the new growth.

A little seed is dropped on the ground, and the snows cover it, and the ice seems strong and lasting as stone; but the spring comes, and the sturdy shoot breaks through and grows tall. The winds vex it, and it bends but never breaks, and so becomes a mighty tree under the shadow of which men rest.

And the tree grows old and fails, till the stock is fit only for the fire, and its tale is told—unless it has borne fruit, and the forest of its offspring covers in the parent bole.

So history does not witness the birth of a new thought, a new truth, against which all at first strive, with the icy chill of neglect, and with tempests of hatred, until its summer comes and its fruit-time. The thoughts of men are full of the power of some strong tyrant who has slain and seized the prey. He is the wild beast set on earth to teach the deer that they must not grow fat and slothful in their pastures. But he in whose heart a new truth is born is a bird of the air, singing above the heads of men. They may stone it and shoot at it and snare it, but some there ever are who will rejoice in its song.

The chief who founded the Hebrew race was, in the eyes of his children, one of these—a man, they said, to whom God spoke, and taught him a new truth, which the passionate genius of the race was to surround with every beauty of song and story, and which was to bind them together as distinct from

other men. We may seek for the birth of this thought in other lands and among other races. We may trace its growth among Greek thinkers, or in Egyptian psalms, but nowhere will it be found as pure and as ancient as among the Hebrews. In an age when men thought themselves surrounded by countless spirits, by great gods of heaven, earth, and hell, of the wind, the sun, the moon, and the sea, the Hebrew knew that God was One, maker of heaven and earth and ruler of all therein.

Very rudely, no doubt, was this thought worded, and among the many it was mingled with ancient superstition. The soul of the universe was still to the Hebrew a being distinct, and only described in very human language—a god who delighted in the savour of the burnt sacrifice, and who haunted chosen abodes, who spoke to them in vision by night, and commanded cruel deeds, and hated those who were yet in their ignorance. Yet a god to be loved as well as feared, and a god of justice and mercy, not only of terror.

And from this great thought, rude and imperfect as it first was, there grew in time

a great Book, which still to many in all lands is the one teacher of right and love, full of the most tender and fair things, though faithful also to record the evils that grew up to choke and to deform. Twenty centuries passed by, till One who was despised and rejected and put to death on the shameful cross came to remind men of that ancient truth, overgrown with the mosses of age, and to enlarge their hearts and understandings by yet a newer teaching that God is love.

Thus not only because for so many ages the Hebrew Bible has been sacred, and the sole teacher of the ignorant over half the earth, but because of the yet greater thought that sprang from the decay of Hebrew faith, it must still be to us a subject of high interest to know how such religion as exists among us came to birth, and whence arose that purifying and ennobling faith in justice, in right, and in love, which is the salt of the earth. A teaching not yet fully grasped, or acting at its height, but one which has still the future before it. Not from Egypt, nor from India, from Greece or Rome, did this

teaching come to the wild Celts and Teutons, of whom it made knights and martyrs. It was the message of the hated Nazarene, who alone among priests and rabbis understood the teaching of the past, and crowned it with His own words of love and pity.

The story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of Joseph and his brethren, is no more than the gathering in of traditions from the various spots which became shrines, when their names were told from generation to generation among a people proud of pure race and of a victorious past. Yet the beauty of many of these stories is such that they can never be forgotten. The force of human interest, the sincerity of conviction, have given to the writer words which appeal even to us so long afterwards, and in a land so unlike that where the scene is laid. We can picture to ourselves the fair Rebecca courteously watering a stranger's camels, and the bright-eyed child Rachel, with her goats, kissed by her cousin. When Joseph becomes known to his brothers it is no long sermon that he preaches them. "I am Joseph," he says, "and is my father yet alive?" He comforts

them with words of a generous heart, with a human love which we can still understand in one so noble. And side by side with this we find the mysterious forms of messengers of doom, the visions and wonders in which all men once believed, the songs of a victorious people, convinced of their right and of their greatness.

Therefore, however curiously the scholar may attempt to dissect the body of the past that is dead, however he may mangle it by his want of knowledge and despise it for its simplicity, it is with the living spirit that we still must deal, and must see the sincerity and truth which lives in those words, wherever written and however little understood; however simple of belief, and ignorant of things which man has learned at last.

The centres of tradition were in the land which Hebrews conquered from earlier tribes. They do not extend to the north, where Hittites and Amorites held their own. Skirting the broad valley of Orontes, then full of their cities, the little Hebrew family wandered on, no doubt, by the deserts of Tadmor, passing Damascus, already a fair town,

by its bright rushing river, amid its gardens and poplar-groves; but it is only when the tent is spread on a brown plateau, close to the two steel-grey shoulders of limestone mountains, rusted with brown, to the cloven valley of pomegranates, olives, figs, and mulberries, that lies in their shadow, and to the oak-tree near Shechem, where the Canaanite tilled the corn-plains, that we hear of any Hebrew resting-place.

Thence southwards, still seeking a land unoccupied, they climbed the rugged hills to Luz, and built a rude dolmen altar to Yehuah, the "Spirit" whom they served. Here, on the east, at their Bethel, or "House of God," they could look across the long ridges and fantastic white chalk-peaks to that green valley in which Jordan ran snake-like to a shining bitter sea, walled in by the long blue wall of Moab and Gilead, and gay with flowers — a very "garden of the Lord," tempting Lot and his shepherds, who as yet knew nothing of the fierce heats and sultry winds of autumn, in that great chasm rent by earthquake of old. And on the west, beyond the utterly barren rocks of Bethel, the

almond-trees of Luz nestled by the spring in the valley; and farther yet, the low hills were grey with waves of silver, as the breeze blew over the long olive-groves, and farthest of all, the corn-plain stretched to the yellow dunes, and to the shining mirror of the Great Sea.

But there was no place of pasture here for Arab flocks, and again they marched along the high ridges of Palestine to Hebron, with its bright green vineyards owned by the war-like sons of Heth, where by purchase they gained a rock-cut tomb in an orchard, their first possession of land in Palestine; and so went down to the bare plateau which rises in hillocks like billows, ridge beyond ridge, where open pastures for their cattle spread round the "Well of the Oath," where Abraham dug in the pebbles of the torrent bed that famous well beside the tamarisk, and so rested on the outskirts of the Philistine kingdom.

All other parts of the western lands, which were fairer than any beyond Euphrates save at the feet of Ararat, had long been owned, tilled, and settled by powerful tribes. Am-

raphel from Babylon came raiding there, like later Assyrians, to gather his tribute from the petty kings and chiefs. He marched over Bashan and through the oak-glades of Gilead to the barren ridges of Moab, and home again by the purple rocks of Petra, the chalky downs of Beersheba, the strange, silent wilderness where Engedi overlooks the oily lake; falling on the mud villages of the Jericho plain, and dogged by Abraham's warrior slaves and the stout Hittite allies. In the north the Tartar princes of his own ruling race, in Hamath and Carchemish, owned his power when shown, but in Lebanon, and among the Hebron hills, the swarthy Amorites, black-bearded and eagle-nosed, held stoutly to their mountains, with walled cities and chariots; and they were of the rival Arab race to which the Hebrews also traced their origin. Farther west in the plains of Gezer and Ascalon a half-Egyptian people were established, worshipping their fish-god Dagon, and ruled by kings with Arab names.

The Tartar supremacy had endured from Persia to Sinai for a thousand years, and

had taught to Western Asia not only arts of war but letters and commerce, the building of cities and tilling of lands. Yet so fleeting is the glory of empire that the names and tongue of these conquerors were forgotten before history was written in Greece. We ask now, "Who was Amraphel?" the man whose name filled every mouth four thousand years ago; and but for Abraham he would be unremembered, as Nergal his god is forgotten. Yet the great movement which brought the Hebrews with it to Syria had spread even to the mouths of the Nile; and princes from Asia had seized on Goshen, and had written their names on the statues of Egyptian kings.

Temples and tombs in Egypt were already ten centuries old. Pyramids had risen at Memphis for kings whose names had become legends. The mild, small-featured race that had lived peacefully in the Delta, and had carved the rocks of Sinai with long texts, and figures of monarchs, seeking copper and blue-stone in its mines, had now been pushed southwards to Thebes, and mingled with the

Nubian negroes. Hordes of Arab shepherds, and Tartars in chariots bringing horses from the north for the first time to the Nile, had filled the plains of Goshen, and overthrown the temples of Horus and Amen. The Hebrews could travel even thus far, like their kinsmen of Edom, and yet find themselves among races from Asia, known to them ere they left Harran and Ur. The Minni who ruled in Goshen came from the slopes of the Taurus, west of Lake Van, and from snowy Ararat. The Pharaohs or "tyrants" owned a name understood in Hebrew speech. But only when famine wasted Palestine, when the heavens were brass and the ground iron, and the east wind blew parching from the desert, and no cloud rose from the western sea in autumn to water the west slopes of Palestine, and fill the streams of Gilead, was it needful that Hebrew shepherds should desert the broad plains of Beersheba, to which, so soon as water flowed again beneath the pebbles of their torrent beds, they fled from the settled lands where kings exacted tribute.

Unchanged to our own day is the life of

such princes of the wilderness. The long black tent is open to the western breeze, and against the camel-saddles he leans on his carpet at rest. His silver and gold are hidden in the ground beneath him, or have been flung abroad to the tribe. From behind the goat-skin curtain are heard the voices of children, and the grinding of the mill, as his wives prepare the cakes and roast the kid for the guest. Their long trains sweep the desert dust as they go forth to the black bags shaken to make butter and cheese, or are girt up as they drive the small donkeys laden with water-pots to the spring. The foals steal in to eat bread from the chief's hand; the calves lie flicking the flies within the shadow of the open tent. The mighty glare fades as the red sunset deepens and the watchman on the hill calls home the cattle. Long droves of black goats, and speckled sheep with huge swinging tails, are brought to the pens by the boys; and the scattered camels come down the western slopes with long shadows before them.

Such in peace is the chieftain's life, varied only when he leads the raid, on swift drom-

edaries, his long lance tufted with ostrich plumes, against some distant tribe, bringing back, when his war-song is heard from the anxious camp, the silver and gold, flocks and herds, of the foe. His only other duties are to count his flocks as they yearly increase, to deal out justice to the tribe, to show his liberality to the poor and his hospitality to the stranger, to protect the man of another tribe who on account of blood flies to his tent-pole, to greet the passing guest, and perhaps entertain angels unaware. He is not ignorant of the life of cities, where men sell and buy, and crowd in markets or at the pageants of the great ; where the busy scribe is scrawling brick tablets to be sealed by his clients ; where caravans are bringing in cloths and spices, and the jewellers are making ornaments for women, and potters and founders are busy with vases, and cutlers with swords and spears. But such life he despises, loving the wild freedom of the outlands and the rest of the desert.

How silent and terrible is that great solitude he alone knows. Where no tree sighs in the wind, and only the distant war-song

of the shepherd is heard. Where the wolf skulks by the broom-bushes, and the panther among the tamarisks near the brook. Where over white rocks flickering in the heat the ghostly herds of ibex scud by, and the hyrax digs his house in the cliff, while, above, the eagles are soaring ever higher and higher looking for prey—an empty land full of terror only, and silent save for the evening chorus of the jackals. It is in such a wilderness, in solitude and repose unbroken, that thought is born. Hence came the faith of Muhammad, and much earlier the Law of Moses. To the many the desert is full of ghosts and demons, goat-men and serpent-men, shapeless things of terror, and corpses cut asunder but still walking abroad, pillars of dust which are the bodies of fiends, and foul beings in caverns who eat the dead. To the few there come other thoughts as they gaze on the heavens at night, and hear in their hearts a still small voice speaking in the mid-day silence. What time have men in cities and markets to think of anything but the daily struggle with others? It is from the desert that the voice of the prophet comes.

Thus, then, the Hebrew chieftains passed their placid lives, troubled only by some sudden raid, or by the quarrels of women and the disputes of sons; and so they were gathered to their fathers, and laid in the rock, and the heir, chosen and blessed, reigned in their stead. Purity of race they valued above all things, despising alliance with the tribes in cities, and sending back to the old home in Harran for wives from among their kin. Thus Ishmael, son of the Egyptian slave-woman Hagar, was reckoned only as the father of wild tribes in Edom and Northern Arabia: his mother fled, according to one tradition, from the angry Hebrew mistress before her child was born; and according to another story, which drew a vivid picture of her sorrows in the desert of Kadesh, she was banished when the pure Hebrew son of Abraham's old age was grown. The strange story of the sacrifice of Isaac, remitted by the merciful God to whom such offerings were hateful, had a meaning in the time when it was written which easily escapes our minds. The sons of Judah in later times laid the scene of this temptation of Abraham

on their Temple mount. The sons of Ephraim showed it on the rugged Mount of Blessing above Shechem. We must remember that when first this story was written the sacrifice of the first-born was a universal custom in Asia during times of trouble. It continued to be practised by Phœnicians and Arabs even to the time when Muhammad finally put down the last traces of this human sacrifice. Hebrew prophets were the first who protested against the cruel murders of children sacrificed to demons, which they saw yet so common among the people. They could point not only to the Law, but to the ancient story of Isaac, when they said that such crimes were never commanded or came into the heart of the God whom they served.

Through pride of race a bride must be sought in distant Harra for the Hebrew heir. The long journey, we are told, was made by Abraham's steward, across Euphrates to the city which stood on the great trading highroad from the Tigris. Through pride of race also Esau the elder was esteemed to have disgraced himself by marriage with Hittite and Ishmaelite wives; and

while Moabites and Ammonites were recognised as cousins of the Hebrews, the mingled tribes of Edom were regarded as partly Tartar, partly Egyptian, by descent from wives of the red hunter brother of the pure Hebrew stock. We are told how Jacob also sought wives in Harran; and his name was remembered at many famous shrines. We read of his dream on the cold moor of Bethel, when unwittingly he slept near Abraham's altar, and saw the great stairway to the gate of heaven, and fiery messengers ascending and descending, while Jehovah Himself appeared above. We trace his home-coming by Mizpeh with its memorial heap, by the round basin of Mahanaim, and the booths of Succoth beneath the lofty ridge of Penuel, and thence to Shalem by the rocky gorge of Ænon, and to the well of Sichar, which he dug near Abraham's oak of Shechem. The first quarrel with the native tribes was here forced on Israel by Simeon and Levi; and a tribe which was in after-times to be peculiar for sanctity was cursed for its violent bloodshed, and doomed to be scattered.

Here too we learn that common customs of the heathen were yet practised by Jacob's wives. The teraphim, or little images of bronze or pottery, that Rachel stole, were the paternal gods of her home. They were hidden under the oak of Shechem, which was hereafter to be called the "magic oak-tree" or "the tree of grace." In Jacob's history, as in that of Abraham, the strange custom of circumcision appears, distinguishing the Hebrews from surrounding tribes. Whether it first arose in Egypt, or among the Arab races east of the Euphrates, we cannot tell; but Arabs and Phœnicians early had this custom, which, since the spread of Islam, has been carried over all Africa and Asia, and marks even the Coptic Christian as well as the Jew in our own time. It formed yet another barrier between the Hebrew and the nations among whom he dwelt—a sacred rite of tribal religion.

Thus in the third generation the tribe of seventy souls, with flocks and herds and slaves, was gathered at Beersheba in winter, or in the vale of Hebron, in summer; owning there a plot of land as also at Shechem;

their cattle roaming far afield wherever untilled land was found; at peace with the townsmen, but strong enough to hold their own. The beautiful story of Joseph closes the cycle of patriarchal tradition, and relates the change of fortune which brought the Hebrew family to Egypt. We hear how far to the north the shepherds wandered from Shechem to the little plain of Dothan, the well (dry in summer) by the low mound whence you look to Carmel on the north, and to the grey Samaritan range with its olive-groves on the south. We see the favourite son, the "Lord of Dreams," in his striped tunic of blue and crimson, approach his jealous elder brothers. We see the long file of camels stalking through the flickering heat, the dusky Ishmaelites from Gilead on the great trade-route to the plains, bearing balm and nuts, but ready to bargain for a Hebrew slave. We may watch their slow march to Joppa, with its gardens and its reefs, where lie the small Egyptian and Phœnician triremes; passing by Ascalon and Ashdod amid the sand-dunes, and by the frontier town of Gaza; fording the Serbonian

swamps, and entering the streets of Zoan, past granite sphinxes and deserted temples, where the great Apepi ruled who worshipped only Asiatic Set. We read of the wonderful fortune of the dream-interpreter, who became the minister of a Pharaoh who was not Egyptian, but himself of Asiatic race; of the dramatic reconciliation with his brethren, and the descent of Israel into Goshen. The story was written by one well versed in Egyptian history; and local touches are given to its style by the Egyptian words the author uses. It was an age when Goshen was the southern outpost of Asia, and when, however hateful to the native Egyptian a shepherd might be, the Hebrews were sure of welcome amongst rulers who had conquered Zoan from the Pharaohs of the south.

Such tales are history as Herodotus wrote it for the Greeks. To the scholar it may be of interest to study the annals of the age, the dates of kings, and the scenes of their wars, but that dry dust of history can never sink into the hearts of men as the story of the Patriarchs has done. We learn from it the customs and beliefs, the thoughts

and ways, of the Hebrew tribe. We learn of their dress and ornaments, their rites, their memorial stones anointed with oil, their visions and their vows, their purity of race, their contempt for settled life. It is the making of a nation which is so recorded, destined to overthrow the conquests of proud kings of Egypt and of Babylon, to whom as yet they were of small account.

II.

CONQUERORS.

PEACE and prosperity for Asiatic tribes was not to last for ever in Egypt. Far south on the Nile banks the native capital of Thebes had risen, and a strong race was growing up in desert lands, with traditions of an old empire, and the ambition to reconquer for the native stock the Nile mouths wrested from them by the Shepherd Kings. Some two centuries or more passed by, and Thebes descended on Memphis, and the heirs of Apepi were beaten and cast forth from Zoan. Then began the age of tyranny, when Asiatics left in Egypt became the slaves of the victorious Theban kings, and Israel groaned in bondage.

The story of the birth of Moses is that of the man born to be great: against whom neither power nor misfortune can prevail. His bulrush cradle on the Nile recalls that of the Chaldean hero-king, Sargina, more than a thousand years before, as read from Babylonian tablets. Tradition has surrounded his figure with a halo of fame as founder and judge; but we seek in vain for any extant record of his deeds, amid the flattering dedications of kings, or the political letters of their ministers. A poor despised race of slaves fled, under an outlawed leader. They had nourished in their memory the ideal of a land of promise where their fathers had dwelt—a land of hills and snowy mountains, of brooks and springs, of olives, figs, and vines, of cold and rain, and of green plains: a land above all where freedom might be won by war. They hated the “iron furnace,” the country of bondage and injustice, the flat, fever-stricken plain of the Nile, with its flies and lice, its muddy canals and frogs, its pestilence and locust swarms. Even the grim desert of Sinai would be better, where the free life of the patriarchs

could be lived again. Hated as shepherds, oppressed by the whip of the taskmaster, they followed the retreat of Asia, where their cousins of Seir perhaps had pointed out a way. In haste they ate the sacrifice with girded loins, and trooped with wives and children, flocks and herds, after their leader to the barren shores of the Red Sea. They passed its shoals in safety at the narrow head, and saw behind them the chariots of their pursuers driving heavily in the quicksands, and overwhelmed by the rising tide. Their triumph is recorded in the ancient song of deliverance, which is perhaps the oldest of their lyrics:—

Sing we the song of Yehuah who triumphed.
Horse and his rider He cast in the sea.
Mighty and glorious shall Yehuah be to me,
For His salvation my God, and I praise Him;
God of my father, and I will extol Him.
Yehuah the warrior, Yehuah His name.
Chariots of Pharaoh and hosts in the sea He cast,
Best of his captains in Red Sea are drowned.
Depths overwhelmed them downward descending,
Down to the bottom like to a stone.
Yehuah, Thy right hand glorious in power,
Yehuah, Thy right hand shattered the foe.
Mightily glorious cast down Thy rebels,

Sent forth Thy wrath and consumed them as straw.
And breath of Thy nostrils heaped up the waters,
Stood as a corn-sheaf upright the floods,
And depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.
The enemy said, I will speed to o'ertake,
Dividing the spoil my delight to fulfil,
Drawing my sword they shall fall to my hand.
Thou didst breathe with Thy breath, the sea spread
 above them
Sinking like lead in the terrible depths.
Who is like Thee among Gods, O Yehuah?
Who is like Thee in glorious holiness,
Fearful to praise and wondrous in deeds?
Thy right hand outstretched made earth to devour
 them,
And led in Thy mercy Thy people redeemed,
Guiding with might to Thy holy abode.
People have heard it and are confounded,
Grief fell upon them dwellers in Palestine;
Then were astonished the rulers of Edom,
Great ones of Moab a trembling has seized on,
Fear is upon all the dwellers in Canaan.
Falling upon them with terror and dread,
Still as a stone by the might of Thy arm.
While passed Thy purchased people, O Yehuah,
Brought in and planted on hills of Thy heritage;
Places of rest that Yehuah has made,
Shrines of my Lord that Thy hands have established,
And Yehuah shall reign for ever and aye.

Slowly and with pain they journeyed on
from the crossing place towards the great and
terrible wilderness which lay between them

and their land of promise. They were too weak to force a way through the Philistine kingdom, when legions of Egyptian chariots guarded the strongholds north of Gaza. All the plains of Palestine had long been garrisoned by the Pharaohs, since the day when the great Thothmes had shattered the power of the northern tribes in the plains near Megiddo, and thence had marched to Damascus and northwards, subduing the Phœnicians of Arvad, and even crossing the Euphrates to levy tribute from Assyria. There was no refuge from Egypt save in the solitudes of Sinai, or among the free tribes of Edom. Cumbered by their women and children, fearing to overdrive their flocks, dreading the attack of the wild Amalekites, and perhaps of the Egyptian bowmen who guarded the mines, they could advance only some ten miles daily, on their way from one scanty watering-place to another. But the Amalekites were driven off, and at length they rested among the palm-trees, where now the bright stream of Rephidim gushes from the rocks, and so in the heat of summer reached the flat plain, from which towered the awful

pinnacles of Horeb blood-red in the sunset glow.

They fed on the manna dropping from the tamarisk-bushes, or feasted when the dark cloud of quails came sweeping northwards close to the ground by night. Everywhere they murmured for want of water, and regretted the fish, the leeks, and onions of Egypt. The land of promise seemed to be ever farther off, and their faith in a great leader alone supported them. Under the dread granite mountain, which towers over all other hills of the desert, they spread their camps, and built their cromlech circle of stones; and beyond was set up that "abode of meeting" where Moses entered alone to commune with God. His presence only could keep them true to the old faith in the God of their fathers, and while it was withdrawn on the mysterious mountain-top they fell back suddenly to Egyptian idolatry, and sacrificed to a calf-image of Jehovah with festival dances and sacrifice.

And here we are told was first given to Israel that ancient book of "ten words," engraved on two stone tables, written on

either side in some strange character—perhaps the old Babylonian writing which was used then all over Palestine, and known in Egypt as well. There was nothing in this Law which might not have been found in the decrees of the Pharaoh, with one exception, and that was yet distinctive of the Hebrew race: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor worship them.”

How hard a saying was this, not only for Israel but for all who followed them, we know. They broke the law of images almost from the first. It needed all the trials of a long captivity to imprint it on the hearts of the people. Surrounded always by the worshippers of images, they have yet, for more than two thousand years, been faithful now to this commandment, which Christians soon broke, and are breaking still to-day. The image is still to the ignorant an idol, as it was among pagans of old—a thing made indeed by man, yet holding within it the

spirit of a god. Wherever such image is set up, in temple or in church, superstition surely clings to it, and wonders are believed to be wrought by it for those who gaze on it and pray. Excused as necessary to imprint ideas on the minds of the untaught, regarded by the educated as merely an artistic memorial of some cherished belief, yet everywhere and always the carving of an image, the painting of a sacred form, surely and quickly drags man back to the idolatry of savage superstition, from which this ancient law was meant to set him free.

From the great desert sanctuary of Sinai the tribes passed on, in hopes of speedy conquest, to the south boundary of Palestine. Before them went their ark, as before armies of Egypt or Babylon in this same age, and where the "tent of meeting" was pitched the camps settled, and sacrifices were offered by the newly consecrated tribe of Levi, to which their leader belonged. In autumn they had reached the foot of the great mountain wall of Edom, near to the frontier city of Kadesh, which lay in the hollow of the hills under the peak of Hor, protected

by the narrow defile where rocks of purple sandstone formed the cleft for a stream, which cleft in much later times was said to have been smitten by the rod of Moses.

And now at length the time of conquest seemed at hand, and spies were sent to view the way. They went up by Beersheba to Hebron, and brought back the fruits of the land—grapes and figs and pomegranates. But they brought also a terrible report of the power of the settled tribes and of the cities. Tall men and walled towns they said they had found, and a land whose inhabitants were eaten up by cruelty of tyrants. The courage of a people who for several generations had been slaves in Egypt, who could barely summon spirit to follow their leader to the desert, and who as yet had never known war, failed at the news. A half-hearted raid on Arad, the nearest town, barring the Hebron road, was followed by a shameful flight. Riot in the camp, plots to murder their leader and to march back to the land of bondage, were followed by civil war among the tribes.

Thus they settled down unwillingly to

shepherd life in the broad valley which runs from Kadesh to the Red Sea under the mountains of Edom. Here for forty years they lived, wandering like Arabs of to-day from water to water, keeping to the western uplands in summer and descending to the streams of Jotabah in winter. The first generation grew old and died away, and the wild desert life bred a new stock of hardy fighting men. Palestine was still peacefully held, in part by the Egyptians, in part by the strong Amorite and Hittite tribes of the hills.

But great changes were about to come, and wars destructive to the settled governments were soon to bring the time for conquest. Meanwhile the Hebrews lived apart, and more and more became distinct in language and in custom from other peoples. At length a wave of revolution broke out in the north. The tribes of Armenia conquered the Hittites of Carchemish, and drove them southwards. The Amorites of Lebanon besieged the seaports of Phœnicia, and swept over Bashan and Gilead, driving before them the Moabites who fled south of Arnon. The

forces of Egypt were repulsed, and rebellion at home led to the loss of her empire in Syria. The whole system of government was shaken, and news of such disasters must have spread even to the camp of Israel.

In Moab, Edom, and Ammon were tribes of kindred race, but the new Amorite lords beyond Jordan were strangers from the north. Circling round the fortress of Kadesh, the Hebrews boldly marched on the distracted lands whence Moab had been expelled, and proved their power by defeat of Amorite chiefs even as far north as Bashan. Slow as was their journey along the west slopes of the Moab plateau, they had no sooner left their women and flocks in the acacia valley opposite Jericho than they were able, by swift marches, in a few months to raid through Gilead even within sight of Damascus, and to claim a goodly land east of Jordan as theirs by right of the sword. Very jealously were these victories regarded by the defeated Moabites and weak tribe of Ammon. We are told of a prophet brought from the far north—from Pethor, whence his fame may have come with the

Lebanon Amorites, who had invaded Moab. We can still visit the mountain-tops whence he saw Israel dwelling beneath him in the valley, and looked over the smooth waters of the bitter sea to the long ridge of Judah's future heritage. Upon these slopes still lie the dolmen tables of Canaanite worship, as also in the valley of Shittim, where Moabite rites were taught to Hebrews by the women of Midian. Among these peaks of the great plateau none is as famous as the little knoll of Nebo, from whence, we are told, Moses took his last look upon the land of promise west of Jordan — a wide prospect of the mountain-range, from Hebron northwards to Ebal and Gilboa and Tabor: a stretch of grey mountains dotted here and there with dark villages, but showing little of the true wealth of corn and wine and oil, which covered then as now the western spurs and plains. But beneath the foot of the mountain were the grassy Jordan plains, the river winding in its coverts, the palms and walls of Jericho beyond, and to the north the oaks and firs of Gilead, where the roe strays in flowery glades.

Hard by to the south was the "Valley of God," wherein perhaps the unknown tomb of Moses was hidden—a great gorge of yellow, pink, and white sandstone and limestone cliffs, with the hot sulphur springs amid the palms, a fitting resting-place for the great founder of the nation. Yet "no man knoweth his sepulchre unto this day."

Three tribes out of twelve, we learn, divided among them the plateau of Moab, the slopes of Gilead, and the corn-plains of Bashan, but sent their fighting men to help the rest in conquering mountain and valley beyond the river.

Jordan was crossed, and, led by the new chief, they fixed their camp in the middle of the Jericho plain, where now a solitary tamarisk marks the site of the great circle of Gilgal which they made. A broad and varied prospect surrounded them there. To the east the sandstone slopes of Moab, with clear brooks welling out of the limestone cliffs above. To the west the barren crags of the desert of Judah. To the north strange conical peaks, and the snowy dome of Hermon faintly seen beyond. To the south

the salt-lands, and the bitter sea between dark mountain walls.

Jericho overthrown, they climbed the steep mountain-path to Ai, and made it "a heap for ever," and won a footing at their paternal shrine of Bethel. The Hivites to the west submitted, gaining by fraud a treaty which was forbidden by the great "ban" against the seven nations of the land they invaded. Westwards the Hebrews marched to that famous pass which guards the road to Sharon, and down the steep slopes they drove the Amorite league before them. An ancient couplet commemorated that famous day in rhyming metre—

Stand still on Gibeon, sun,
And moon in vale of Aiylun.

Thence pouring down the western slopes, the fierce desert-men fell on the cities of Philistia, and, conquering Lachish, entered the broad valley that leads to Hebron, and even farther south demolished Debir on the hills above Beersheba. Thus the great raid against open towns, which in a few hours became smoking heaps of ruins, swept round the

whole kingdom of Jerusalem, and left the walled capital standing alone.

Wherever they went these ruthless conquerors slew without pity men and women, old and young, sparing only the children as slaves. They ruined town and temple, and took the flocks as spoil. They hewed down the sacred groves and poles, upset the dolmen altars and the standing-stones of mountain shrines, broke in pieces the idols of copper and pottery, of silver and gold; and when all Palestine save Galilee was conquered, they gathered at Shechem to attest their own faith, and raised on the barren brow of Ebal a stone plastered with clay, on which they wrote the curses against any who should waver from the Law of Sinai or practise the superstitions of the Amorite.

The conquest of Galilee was a yet greater victory for Israel. The kings of the north had gathered in the plains near Hazor with chariots of iron. Thus far the Hebrews had met only with a people accustomed to rely on the Egyptian bowmen for defence, but had never encountered the terrible war-cars of the plains. Yet their fierce charge was

driven home, until they could hough the horses and overset the chariots; and the whole country to the foot of Hermon was raided, and all the shore-lands to Sidon. Only in the western plains were the Philistine allies of Egypt able to hold the seaports of Sharon and the south.

The division of the land is said to have followed immediately, under the guidance of Joshua their leader. Reuben already possessed Moab north of the great Arnon gorge, Gad had broad pastures in Gilead, and Manasseh had the towns and corn-lands of Bashan. On the west the strongest tribes were Judah and Joseph, who occupied all but Galilee. To Judah belonged high mountains covered with vines, low hills with olive-groves, and valleys of corn, as well as the wilderness of Engedi. The northern border ran south of Jerusalem to Rachel's tomb near Bethlehem, and so to the sea south of Joppa. The Beersheba plateau was given to Simeon, and a lot was carved out of the mountains of Joseph for Benjamin, including the venerated shrine of Bethel. To Ephraim fell the rugged mountains south of Shechem,

full, however, of springs and corn-valleys and orchards. The great tribe of Manasseh had the rich lands of Samaria and Carmel. Issachar occupied the plains of Lower Galilee, but soon became subject to the Canaanite lords of its towns. To Zebulon was given a region of low hills to the sea-coast of Accho, and to Asher the olive-clad slopes between Accho and Tyre. Naphtali held both the high mountains of Upper Galilee and the plateau round the Lake of Genesaret to Jordan.

Six shrines of refuge, and other cities of Levi, were set apart as sacred centres, many of which were consecrated by tradition, or became the resting-places of the ark. It remained only to drive out the western peoples who hindered the smaller tribe of Dan from holding the plains near Joppa; and to fulfil the ambition of the nation, which pointed to conquest in Lebenon, as far at least as Hamath; but this ambition was not fulfilled until five centuries had passed away from Joshua's time.

In the desert there had been but one centre of worship, as there was but one

camp. In Palestine the tribes were scattered far apart, and such a centre of religion was hard to establish and to maintain. The natural centre was Shechem, both from its position in the midst of the land and from its memories of the past. It was here, we are told, that Joshua first assembled the tribes in a great act of worship, first recorded the laws on a monument, and afterwards renewed the covenant to serve Jehovah, when he raised a stone at Abraham's oak by the sanctuary of the national god, at the foot of the Mount of Blessings. Round this great hill-top, one of the highest in the country, many shrines were established. To the south, Joshua's own tomb among the roughest ridges of the land he conquered: to the east, the sepulchres of the earliest priests, Phinehas and Eleazar and Ithamar: to the north, the shrine of Abraham's oak, and the deep shaft of Jacob's well, and the tomb that at last covered the bones of Joseph. The centre was removed, it is said, even in Joshua's lifetime to the remote mountain of Shiloh. The Shechem sanctuary was eclipsed in later times, when Judah over-

came Joseph, by the capital which as yet was unconquered. But the first gathering-place of Israel was in the natural sanctuary of refuge at Shechem, within the borders of the great tribe to which had belonged both the greatest of Jacob's sons and the victorious leader who had won the land of promise for his race.

III.

JUDGES.

WHEN Joshua died he left no great successor. Israel was spread abroad over the land, without any central government, and engulfed amid the yet unconquered Canaanites, who, when the fear of the great destroyer passed away, came back to build up their ruined towns, and to live among their conquerors. The regular gathering thrice a-year at one shrine seems to have fallen into disuse among the many. The distances were great, and jealousies among the tribes grew up as they separated from each other. Few further conquests were made, and only in times of excitement would Israel gather at Bethel, or at the neighbouring

town of Mizpeh on the high watershed of Ephraim.

The conquerors had destroyed, but had not quite rooted out, an ancient civilisation, which told on their manners and beliefs as time went on. The tribes which were—according to the law of the “ban”—to have been utterly destroyed, were thinned and made slaves in the mountains. In the plains they held their own because of their chariots. They possessed arts as yet unknown to Hebrews, but which served to teach and to enrich their masters. They were probably not worse than other nations, though superstition and corruption had weakened them for centuries before the Hebrew conquest. They could write in characters then common to all Western Asia. Their art was highly cultivated, and they had beautiful metal-work, inlaid woods, statues with heads of gold, fine cloths and linen, jewels and brodered robes, a trade with Egypt and Babylon, and a country rich in corn and fruits. Their sensuous rites, their offerings and incense, their temple girls, their hymns to Tammuz and Ashtoreth, their

human sacrifices and mystic emblems, awakened the interest of the desert-men, and soon corrupted their faith. Marriage with the fair daughters of the land brought with it influences foreseen but not to be avoided; and, as the ancient hardihood and independence of the desert died away, under the new bonds of settled life and increased wealth, the Hebrews seemed in danger of forgetting their past, and of sinking to the common level of their neighbours.

Fierce disputes between the tribes early arose, like that which led to the destruction of Benjamin, when the conscience of the nation was roused by a deed of shame. The very Levites—even a grandson of Moses himself—became idolatrous priests for sake of money. Lawless bands, such as those of the men of Dan who found no room for themselves on the low hills of Zorah, roamed abroad and robbed even their brethren. It was a time of general confusion far beyond the limits of Palestine. The Greek races were swarming over the Bosphorus, into Ionia, and spreading east to Syria. They marched southwards by land to Egypt

after the death of the great conqueror Rameses Miamun, and their pirate fleets infested the Great Sea. Rameses had reconquered the plains, and had even subdued tribes of Israel. He had defeated the northern Hittites of Carchemish, and levied tribute on the towns near Tyre and Sidon. Throughout some four centuries the Hebrews, though masters of the mountains, and though from time to time, under a local leader, they showed their ancient courage and love of freedom, were constantly invaded by fiercer tribes from every side, by the rulers of Babylon and Assyria from the north, by Moabites and Midianites from the east, and by the Egyptians and Philistines on the west. Of this age we have only imperfect records through the gathering together of tribal traditions, but here and there a picturesque episode survives, or an ancient song is preserved.

Such was the victory of Barak over Sisera, the captain of the host of Hazor. The iron chariots of Jabin were posted beside the winding Kishon, and in the oak-woods of Harosheth, under the dark ridge of Carmel. The northern tribes, long oppressed, gathered

courage to rebel, and met on the slopes of that strange round hill of Tabor, which stands alone above the plains at the swampy springs where Kishon rises. With all their ancient vigour they charged down on the chariots, and drove them into the boggy stream; and Sisera fled eastwards to the rolling plateau above Gennesaret, where Heber the Kenite had pitched his tent. The savage revenge of Jael has often been said to disgrace the Hebrews, who so strongly praised her for the murder of a fugitive and a guest; but if the Jewish writers of later times are not mistaken, the fault lay, not with her, but with the lawless Sisera himself, who rewarded with violence her proffered hospitality. Some hint of this may even be found in Deborah's song of triumph, which is the second great lyric of the Hebrews, preserving to us a picture of their society and religion about a century after the conquest:—

Since Pharaohs tyrannised
In Israel,
That the people spent themselves,
Bless ye Yehuah.

Hear, O ye kings ;
And listen, O ye princes ;
I to Yehuah,
Even I, am singing ;
Praising Yehuah,
Elohim of Israel.
Yehuah, at Thy going
On Thy way from Se-ir,
From the field of Edom,
Earth thereat trembled ;
Yea, the heavens droppèd,
The clouds dropped their waters,
Mountains were melted
By the face of Yehuah ;
Yea, even Sinai,
By the face of Yehuah
Elohim of Israel.

In the days of Shamgar,
In the days of Jael,
Empty of travellers
Then were the highways.
Travellers were walking
In winding paths.
Empty were the villages
In Israel,
Empty till I arose,
Deborah, I arose,
Mother in Israel.

New gods were chosen :
Then were they storming
Cities. Was a buckler,

Was there a spear seen
In forty thousand
Of Israel?
My heart is for Israel's chiefs,
Spent for the people,
Bless ye Yehuah.
They who ride on asses,
Milky white ones, sitting
On their cloths, or trudging
On the road, shall say :
" For the noise of archers
At the watering-places,
Now they tell the judgments,
Yehuah's judgments,
And all His ruling
Over Israel,"
As they go to cities
Of Yehuah's people.
Wake, awake, O Deborah !
Wake, awake, and sing.
Rise, O Barak ! Lead thy captives
Captive, O Abinoam's son !
Then went down a noble remnant,
Yehuah's people, 'gainst the mighty.
Some of Ephraim's race,
On Am'lek after thee.
Benjamin among thy men,
Some of Machir, too,
Governors of Zebulon,
Wielding rulers' staves.
And the chiefs of Issachar,
Dwellers in Dabarah,
Issachar, whom Barak

To the valley sent.
By the streams and brooks of Reuben
Hearts were pondering much.
Why in sheepfolds tarry,
Hearing bleating flocks?
By the brooks of Reuben
Hearts were pondering much.
Gilead dwelt o'er Jordan :
Why stayed Dan in ships?
Asher in sea havens dwelt,
Settled in his creeks.
Hazarded to death their lives,
Zebulun and Naphtali :
To the upland regions
Of the field they came.
Kings then were fighting,
Kings of Canaan fighting,
By Megiddo's springs in Taanach :
Gain of silver none they took.
Heaven fought, the stars ascending
Fought the men of Sisera.
Kishon has swept them,
Swift rushing river.
River Kishon, mighty spirits
Thou hast sped.
Then were the horsehoofs
Broken by spurning,
Spurning the great.
Cursèd be Meroz !
Said Yehuah's angel,
Cursed with a curse
The dwellers therein,
For never came they

Helping Yehuah,
Helping Yehuah,
Mighty ones among.

Blessed among women, Jael,
Blest of women in the tent ;
Water asking, milk she brought him
In a mighty bowl,
Brought him curdled milk, her hand
Stretching for the nail.
In her right the workman's hammer,
Hammer smiting Sisera.
When his head was smitten,
Stricken through his temples,
'Twixt her feet he bowed, he fell ;
'Twixt her feet he lay ;
Bowing, falling where he bowed,
There he fell a corpse.

From the window looking,
Sisera's mother cried,
From the lattice, " Why so long
Till his chariot come ?
Wherefore so long tarrying
Are his chariot-wheels ?"
Her wise ladies answered,
Ever to herself
So the words repeating :
" Surely they have sped ;
They have shared the booty,
Heaps on heaps to each.
Brodered spoil of garments dyed,
Sisera's spoil of garments dyed—

Broidered, dyed, yea, double broidered
On the necks—a spoil.”

So, Yehuah, Thy foes shall perish ;
So shall they that love Thee
Shine as the sun doth
Going forth in power.

Turn again from this wild ballad to the beautiful idyll of Ruth, the Moabite ancestress of David. Read of her love for the aged Naomi, of their weary journey to Bethlehem, of the sturdy, sunburnt farmer Boaz, hailing his reapers as they crouched to cut the short-stalked barley; of the dark maiden gleaning after them a few grains, to be pounded in a hollow of the rocks for food; of the strange suppliant who kissed her kinsman's feet in the darkness; of the yet stranger custom of “loosing the shoe,” by which the man yet nearer of kin renounced his right to her. It is a story of human love and kindness, of strong clan feeling even for a widow not of the Hebrew race, set in the midst of tales of war and wrong, to show us the life of Hebrews when at peace.

Or read again how Gideon stole down by night to the broad valley, where the dark

tents of Midian were spread, and the host of their camels ate up the cornfields; of the dream told in his hearing, how the barley-cake of giant size rolled over the camp—fit emblem of the nomad host crushed by the harvesters of Israel. We can picture the march of the Hebrews, with their torches hidden in pitchers, by the valley where barren Gilboa gleamed white in the moonlight to the south, and the dark volcanic peak rose on the north: the panic in the camp when torches flared and trumpets blew, and the wild Arabs fled scattered over the Jordan plain to the shallow fords—cut off on the south by Ephraim, driven from the north by Gideon, pursued up the steep hills and over the plateau of Gilead—the “wolf” slain by the Wolf’s winepress, and the “raven” at the Raven’s rock.

Again another story is told of the victories of Hebrews in Gilead. Of Jephthah, the son of a strange woman, cast out northwards by his brothers. A stout man of his hands, whose help was sorely needed when the Beni Ammon came from their well-watered valley, to dispute the rights maintained for three

hundred years. From north to south they were driven, flying over Arnon; and then we witness the despair of the home-coming of Jephthah to his house on the hill-top of Mizpeh: the maidens coming down with timbrels and dance: the giving up of his only daughter to her fate because of the binding vow: the mourning song of her companions, who went yearly wandering on the mountains to weep for the maiden, slain on one of those rude altars which yet lie ruined on the slopes of Gilead.

Among the olive-clad foothills to the south, and in the vineyard valley of Sorek, we see the giant Samson sending his jackals with their torches among the corn, or lying in the lap of false Dalilah, who played with the black curls never shorn by the Nazarite from birth. Many a legend of his strength and daring clung to the valleys round his home, and especially that of his death-scene, when the blind and weary giant leaned on the pillars of Dagon's temple, and buried people and idol with himself—the vengeance of the slave who had so long ground their corn in darkness, and was brought out on the feast-

day to make sport for the cowards of Philistia.

The land of promise was a kingless and distracted land, where might was right, and where every deed of valour, lawless as it might be, was told with pride from mouth to mouth, when the people gathered to the vintage-feast, or round the fire at night. Not an age of annals or state histories as yet, but one of unwritten tradition and of remembered songs.

Yet throughout that lawless age, in which the Hebrews were learning that some settled government, by kings, could alone weld them into a state strong enough to hold its own against surrounding kingdoms, there was one bond that could unite them at times, one central shrine where the faith of the past was preserved, by the visible emblems of altar, ark, and tent. The sons of Levi were scattered, not only in their appointed cities, but also as guests in other towns. Their duty was to remind their brethren how thrice each year a pilgrimage to Shiloh should be made, at the feasts of spring, summer, and autumn—the memorial festivals of Passover,

the harvest, and the vintage. Corrupted as their faith had become, there still were some who obeyed the old commandment, and brought their gifts and sacrifices to that hidden sanctuary in the wild mountains of Ephraim.

Concealed on every side by grey stony ridges, the long, black, flat-roofed tent stood in a narrow valley of the heights,—its western end red with dyed ram-skins, its acacia pillars set in sockets of silver. Round it ran the outer screen of blue, brodered with gryphon-like cherubs flanking palm-like arabesques. Before the veil stood the red copper altar, within were hidden the ark and the lamp of God. The priests of Jehovah abused a power which had no doubt already been sanctioned by custom, and by written laws on tablets of brick; but their insolence drove many from the shrine, and their faith was corrupted by foreign customs. Here we see the sad childless wife praying by the pillar, and again returning proud and glad with the son of her vows. We read how year by year she made for Samuel “a little coat,” and brought it with her at the season

of sacrifice. Grim and solitary was that remote and barren valley save when the Hebrews gathered at their feasts. A lonely child, guarded by an old blind priest, watching the bloody sacrifices, gazing on the gleaming lamp of gold, and the strange forms of the woven cherubs, witnessing the golden ark brought out for war amid thick clouds of sweet incense, or the gems cast to give a lot, deciding the conduct of the nation. Seeing also, perhaps, things unfit for a child—the evil deeds of Eli's sons. Lonely and pondering in his heart, until it seemed that a voice spoke gently to him in the darkness, telling him the fate of those who had profaned the sanctuary of his race. So in a wilderness he grew to be unlike other men, and all Israel knew that Samuel was a prophet whose words would not fall to the ground.

The end came swiftly when the terror-stricken messenger, with clothes rent and earth on his head, ran over the hills to spread the news of disaster—of priests and fighting men slain, the ark deserted, and the tall Philistines coming up to reap the har-

vests of Israel. Henceforth Shiloh was no longer a sacred spot: it was forgotten and ruined: its sacred tent and vessels were taken away to another city of the priests in Benjamin. But out of disaster came greater strength, when Samuel stood alone as chosen leader, gathering the tribes on the bleak hills of Mizpeh. The ark was restored; and the men of Bethshemesh beheld the rude cart with its lowing kine come creaking up the rough valley, on which Samson's tomb looked down, as they raised their eyes from the harvest. But the power of the Philistines was broken only when, with new zeal, Israel followed the stern young prophet to drive the heathen down the gorges of Judah back to their plains; setting up in memory of their victory the famous "Stone of Help," which became the new centre of the southern tribes.

Samuel was then the last and greatest judge of Israel, yearly visiting the ancient cromlech shrine of Gilgal, the old altar of Bethel, and the new centre at Mizpeh, dealing justice to that wild race whereof he made one people, and founding an order of prophet-

preachers who went like dervishes of to-day in bands, with tabors and pipes, from shrine to shrine, venerated by the fiercest, and forcing men to observe the faith, by ecstasies of zeal, and by denunciations of doom to the disobedient. The power of the priesthood had fallen, through their own corruption. The power of the prophets instilled a new life into distracted Israel, and built up a nation in times when other kingdoms to north and south—in Assyria and Egypt—were sinking in decay, and when the future promised fair for freedom and sovereignty, if only the Hebrews could unite against their foes, and learn their strength amid the scattered heathen.

IV.

KINGS.

“ ‘WHOSE ox, or whose ass, have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I taken any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith?’ ”

“ And they said, ‘Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man’s hand.’ ”

Yet the people who loved Samuel, and thought that he only could choose for them the right king, were not wrong in their demand. He was old, and his sons did not walk in his ways. The government by priests had failed under Eli. Government by prophets was precarious. To make a nation a warrior and a king was needed, and they trusted

Samuel to find him. He was found in the town nearest to Samuel's home—a tall dark man of perhaps forty, with grown sons. No goodlier person was known in Israel. But the choice and the appointment were secret at first, because of the Philistines. Wandering over the hills of Ephraim and Benjamin to seek his father's asses, he came to the unknown town in the south, where the women were drawing water in the valley. He asked for the seer's house, and climbed the hill where round the shrine—perhaps in presence of the ark—the people waited for Samuel to bless the sacrifice. It was a time when the old centre at Shiloh had been left deserted; when the tent was at Nob, and the ark at Kirjath-jearim; when Samuel, like Elijah in later days, sacrificed at many shrines—a Levite but not a priest, a prophet who stood above the law of earlier and later times. Here secretly he anointed the first king of all Israel, though not the first Hebrew who had borne the title. The secret was kept from all till the next meeting of the nation at Mizpeh, and then confirmed by divination; and Samuel laid down the duties

of king and subjects, and wrote them "in the record." The king was at least to be a Hebrew, and not a stranger. He was forbidden to trade with Egypt for horses and chariots, to take strange wives, or to hoard up silver and gold. From the priests he must learn the Law of Israel, and read therein all his life. His first duty was to maintain the religion of the race, and to be zealous against the heathen. His subjects were warned that the new settled state demanded tithes and taxes, instruments of war and chariots, none of which as yet the Hebrews had known: for even smiths were forbidden among them by their Philistine masters. They were told of the danger of tyranny, of royal lands to be taken from the tribes, and the tenth exacted of the flocks. The check on kings was sought in the influence of priests, and in the fearless speech of prophets.

Meantime in Gilead a mountain city was oppressed by the king of Ammon, and gained only a seven days' truce, to see whether help might come from the west. Here was Saul's opportunity, and short as was the time, he

took it. Five days were barely enough for his swift messengers to go south and north, and bring back with them fighting men—armed only with clubs and mattocks: yet it could be done, and from Bezek on the high hill north of Shechem it was but a day's long march to Jabesh-gilead. The Ammonites, surprised at dawn, were scattered, and the men of Jabesh owned a debt, which they paid sadly enough some twenty years later, of gratitude to Saul. Thus at length the Hebrews ventured to rebel against their masters, and crowned a king in the old circle of Gilgal, the camp where first their fathers had rested on the soil of Canaan.

The news of this revolt brought up the Philistine host to the mountains; and against the army in the plain of Jericho they held the road at the deep gorge close to Saul's house, called then the "Valley of Thorns," with crags on either bank above the village of Michmash. The hearts of the Hebrews failed before a well-armed host, for save Saul and Jonathan his son, who had perhaps taken spoils from the Ammonites, they had neither sword nor spear. They hid in the desert

caves, or deserted the host and fled over Jordan. They waited for a week for Samuel to come and offer the sacrifice, and at length the king himself performed it.

The little rift, to widen into a broader schism between the will of kings and that of Levites, thus broke forth almost from the first. Kings in other lands were high-priests and gods, but not by law in Israel. The offering of sacrifice was the duty of the sons of Levi, and Samuel was jealous for his sacred tribe. The ideal king was one who would turn neither to left nor right, but carry out all the Law, neither adding nor omitting any ancient precept. But as yet the new yoke was hardly felt by the nation, and the great quarrel was stayed in presence of national danger. Jonathan the king's son—one of the most chivalrous figures of Hebrew history—smote first the Philistine outpost at his father's home; and while the army still lingered with the ark upon the desert ridges farther east, he climbed the cliff of Michmash—a long steep path up thyme-covered ledges, to the northern garrison of the defile, and fell upon the panic-stricken Philistines, aided only by the youth

who bore his shield. The din of battle was heard, and the flash of weapons seen, from the southern cliff; and after hasty inquiry by the stones of divination, the unarmed crowd that lay in the caves, or round Saul's tent by the solitary tree on the precipice, hurried forward to the fight, and drove the heathen once more across the barren watershed down to the plains. So were the mountains reconquered and Israel armed. For many years after the frontier wars went on, not only with the Philistines to the west, but even with the Syrians to the north, and Edom to the south, till Saul became a power in the land. Only, indeed, as yet a ruler of shepherds and farmers, with a small army of mail-clad men: living in his tent or in his house in Gibeah, and having as yet neither horse nor chariot; but still the ruler of a free people. The Law, so far as he knew it, he obeyed. The people were forbidden to eat blood. The Canaanite witches and wizards were cut off. The duty of the "ban" against the old tribes of Palestine was recognised, and the ancient curse on Amalek was not forgotten.

But here again the zeal of Samuel was unsatisfied. The fierce tribes of Sinai were indeed smitten to the Egyptian border; but the king was spared, and the flocks and herds were taken as spoil. The stern old prophet listened to no excuse: no quarter would he give to the unhappy Agag; and the torn mantle in which he stalked away from penitent Saul betokened the kingdom rent in twain, the schism between king and priest, the enmity which led to the massacre of Levi at the new priestly city of Nob, and the refusal ever again to bring the ark to war while Israel fought under a sacrilegious king. No doubt there were other causes which led to discontent. The jealousy of Judah and Joseph, the privileges of the small tribe of Benjamin, the increasing exactions of the gloomy monarch, and the disappointment when he failed utterly to quell the robber bands of Philistia. But Israel still believed in rule by a king, and only doubted if after all the right king had been found. The fatal spirit of discord, which made the history of Hebrew freedom to be so short and ever so insecure, rose in the first years of the first

reign. The power of Saul was fatally wounded by the wrath and coldness of the man who ruled no longer, but whose words were still a law to the people.

Then, after perhaps ten years had passed away, we see the aged figure in its sweeping mantle, driving along the stony road to Bethlehem a red heifer for sacrifice, but intent on his secret mission to find another king. The elders trembled at his coming, and little knew its meaning. The sons of Jesse passed by him, but none was chosen, until at length the shepherd youth from the desert—the genius of Israel, the sweet singer to the harp—with ruddy face and dark elf-locks, and shining eyes goodly to see, was brought before him, and the voice whispered, “Arise. Anoint him, for this is he.”

Loved and famous he already was. In the wild deserts of Engedi he had grown to manhood, defending his flocks from beasts of the field and robbers of the night. The bear had come down from the Hebron coverts, the lion had crept up from the Jordan jungles, and both had fallen at his hands. So famous also already were his

songs to the harp that, when the gloomy spirit of Saul demanded music for its solace, the name of David at once was in the mouths of all. But little did the sad and angry king observe or know the darling of the people, who came at times to play before him and refresh his soul. The wrath of Samuel, and the raids of the Philistines, filled his thoughts, rather than the fame of David.

A broad corn-valley dotted with terebinths led from the mountains of Judah to the white hill of Gath. Here, on opposing ridges, the Hebrews in their camp, the Philistines in their tents, close to the "border of blood," looked over the vale at one another. The giant in his coat of mail, and copper helmet and greaves, came out to insult the armies of Israel. The shepherd, filling from the pebbles of the boundary brook his scrip of leather, came through the corn to meet him, with the light of morning in his shining eyes, and on his ruddy cheek and dark elf-locks; and Israel echoed with the song that rankled evermore in Saul's dark heart—

Saul hath slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands.

At length Saul saw, in that half-forgotten minstrel, the rival all the more hated, and feared, because so loved. Loved by Jonathan the heir, by Michal, the bride who rewarded later victories—Saul's second daughter, who, when the first plots threatened David's life, made of the idol which she worshipped an image of her hero, and let him go free. Then came the slaughter of the priests of Jehovah, the gathering of an outlaw band in the smoky cave of Adullam, close to the scene of the victory over Goliath; the treachery of the ungrateful men of Keilah a few miles south, the pursuit to Ziph, and to the rocks of the wild goats near Engedi, the wild adventures when the desert outlaw refused to slay the Messiah of Jehovah, the double repentance of Saul, and his strange dialogue with his rival across the impassable chasm of the desert ridge, the folly of Nabal, who refused the customary present to those who had guarded his sheep from robbers in the wilderness, the wedding with rich Abigail, the alliance with Philistia and with the farthest towns of Judah in the south, the secret raids on heathen tribes, which were the

assurance that David was still a Hebrew at heart. As time passed on and Saul became an aged king, feared but no longer loved by his people, the rival power became yet more and more a danger to his throne.

At length we see him with a diminished host, camped by the spring of Jezreel before the Philistine army by the brook of Shunem, stealing by night through the valley, past their camp, to meet the witch in Endor under the black volcanic peak of Moreh. And we read of the dim form in the familiar mantle—an old man rising from the earth with the grim message, “To-morrow shalt thou with thy sons be with me in Sheol.”

Few of his deeds, perhaps, were more admired than was the sad elegy—that Song of the Bow—in which David lamented the death of his enemy and the defeat of Israel:—

O pride of Israel ! slain on thy mountains.
How fell the mighty !
Tell it not in Gath, nor in the streets of Ascalon,
Lest Philistia's girls be glad,
Lest the heathen girls rejoice.
Hills of Gilboa, may no dew
And no showers be on you,

Neither fields for offerings.
For there was cast away,
Vilely, the hero's shield ;
Shield of Saul, never more
With oil anointed.
From the blood of slain ones,
From the fat of heroes,
Bow of Yehunathan
Never turned backward.
Saul's sword never
Came back empty.
Saul and Yehunathan, lovely and pleasant
In their lives, and in their deaths never were severed.
Swifter than eagles, stronger than lions.
Daughters of Israel,
Over Saul make moaning.
He in scarlet clad you
With all things beautiful,
Putting golden ornaments
On your apparel.
How fell the mighty all amid the battle !
O my Yehunathan ! slain on thy mountains.
Woe is me for thee, brother Yehunathan !
Wondrous dear to me thou wast ;
More than woman's love thy love.
How fell the mighty,
And perished their weapons !

Only king as yet of Judah, David still left
to Saul's house the throne of Israel ; but
while the scrupulous chivalry of the king
pleased the people, the ruthless Joab suffered

nothing to stand in the way of his ambition, which was bound up in zeal for his uncle's cause; and after seven years, Saul's heir and Abner his general having been murdered, all Israel accepted the man whom Samuel had anointed, and whose success in war was constant. For many years after that success remained the same. The rock-scarps of Jerusalem, where the lame and the blind mocked the besiegers, were scaled, and what had once been the royal city of the Amorites became David's capital—more central than Hebron, stronger as a mountain fortress than Shechem, and already one of the largest towns in the kingdom. The Philistines were defeated by a skilful flank attack from Adullam, while they climbed the rugged ridge of Baal-perazim marching on Jerusalem. The tide of war was rolled back to the frontiers on either side. Garrisons occupied Edom, after a battle in the "Valley of Salt." The Syrians near Damascus were conquered; and even the king of Hamath sent presents to David. The Ammonites and Moabites were subdued and cruelly punished, and the old precepts which recognised the kindred

tribes of these three regions—Moab, Ammon, and Edom—as owning the lands they held in Joshua’s time, did not prevent the king from claiming lordship over all who dwelt within the boundaries of a kingdom larger than Egypt or Assyria, and extending to the borders of the Hittites at Kadesh on Orontes, and of the Phœnicians in Tyre. The fullest extent of dominion was not indeed reached till Solomon’s reign, when the Philistine plain became — by consent of the allied Pharaoh — at length a part of the Hebrew kingdom, and when on the north it stretched even to the Euphrates, the Syrian princes becoming tributaries. But during David’s own life the dream of independence was fulfilled, throughout the country held by the twelve tribes from Dan to Beersheba, and even farther south and north.

One of the first acts of the new monarch was the establishment once more of a central shrine in his new royal city. A long procession of priests, soldiers, and people followed the golden ark, from the copses of Kirjath-jearim along the ridge that rose to Jerusalem. King David in his linen tunic

danced before it, as the proud sarcastic daughter of Saul saw from her lattice, with bitter memory of the old days, when priests refused to bring their ark into her father's camp, remembering their brethren slain at Nob. With sacrifices and songs, the blowing of trumpets and clouds of incense, the ark of Jehovah, wherein were hid the ancient stone tablets of the Law, was taken to the tent spread for it in the city. The copper altar stood in the court to its east, and the descendants of Aaron's elder son regained the place which had been held, in Eli's time, by the descendants of the younger—a family disgraced by memories of the days of Shiloh.

But in later years, when the once shining eyes were dimmed, the black elf-locks, now bound with gold, were seamed with grey, and the ruddy face was hollowed with cares, David on his throne was surrounded by all the plots and schemes of Eastern treachery, by false counsellors, ambitious soldiers, jealous wives, and sons intent on the succession. The shameful intrigue with Bathsheba, which sullied his reign, had brought to notice the astute Ahithophel, her grandfather, who

found a ready tool in discontented passionate Absalom. Injustice, and the oppression of David's ministers, gave strength to the rebellion, and only when he acted for himself—roused by new dangers and warned by old experience—was the peace re-established, at the expense of new griefs. Then in the day of victory he mourned, in distant Mahanaim, the loss of that brilliant and favoured son, named in hope the "Father of Peace," now lying under the stone-heap in the oak-wood, pierced by Joab's spears, and remembered by others only as the murderer of his brother, the traitor to his father, the enemy of peace in Israel. Remembered also by that saddened father as when, in the days of his pride, he weighed the thick locks and gave the weight to the poor, or spake courteously to all men in the gate. So dear and so winning that even Ammon's murder was forgiven him. And now—"O Absalom, my son, my son!"

These were the sorrows of later days, when aged Barzillai's words might be remembered, "Can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women?" Other bitter

memories also burrowed in the old king's heart — Jonathan's son and his doubtful gratitude; Shimei, Saul's kinsman, and his curses on the tyrant; Joab, the bloody nephew who had slain Absalom against his orders, and joined the later rebel Adonijah with Abiathar, the priest whose life David had saved in the old days at Adullam. It was a sad sunset to the great day, although the end was peaceful. Nevertheless the ancient spirit of hope and trust was not extinct in David's heart, as his last words remind us:—

Said David, Jesse's son,
Saith the man set up on high,
Messiah of Jacob's God,
Dear to song in Israel.
Yehuah's Spirit spake to me,
His word was on my tongue.
Saith the God of Israel,
Saith the Rock of Israel :
"He who justly governs men,
Ruling in the fear of God,
Is as light when dawn arises,
Sunny dawn without a cloud,
With earth's flowers that spring from rain."
Thus my house shall be with God,
All my hope, my every wish
Shall not He fulfil.

Evil men be thorns thrust out,
For no hand may handle them ;
Who would touch them must be fenced,
All in steel, with shaft of spear,
And in fire they burning burn.

But the last scene in all this strange eventful history is vivid as any other in the ancient chronicle. We hear the shouts of Adonijah's faction on the rock of Zoheleth, whence Joab and his fellow-rebels insult the aged hero sunk on his bed, and cared for by the beautiful Abishag. We witness the fears of the opposite party, and their appeal to Bathsheba, the wife who still held the king's heart. We see the old lion rouse once more as he renews his oath to her ; and, down the stony lane that led from the south gate of Jerusalem, a procession of citizens accompanies Nathan the prophet, Zadok the priest, Benaiah the rival of Joab, and the trusty guards, who surround the youth on the king's mule, leading him to the cavern spring of Gihon, below the slope that faced the rock of Zoheleth, where the rebels were feasting. Without a blow the plot was quelled : the guests slipped silently away ;

and Adonijah fled to the altar to beg his life of Solomon from the sanctuary.

The death of David followed hard upon this scene, and then the murder of Joab, and the disgrace of Abiathar—banished to a priestly city. The new king, who no doubt inherited the comeliness of his father and beauty of his mother, proved also to be strong and wise; and ruled for forty years a land where Hebrews lived in peace under their vines and figs. His alliance with Egypt by marriage, his later connection with the Hittite princes of the north, his conquests in Edom and Syria, raised the power of his house to its summit, and the prosperity of the Hebrew kingdom reached its zenith. Even an Arab queen had heard of his fame and wisdom, and came with her caravan of spice-bearing camels from the far south to see his glory. Trade and art flourished during his peaceful reign: horses and chariots were brought from Egypt: ships coasted down to Joppa from the Cilician port of Tarsus, and fleets in the Red Sea visited Ophir in Yemen, bringing back gold of Arabia. Ivory and

apes and peacocks came with the merchants from Babylon, along the great trade-route to the west, or from the Abyssinian mountains to the south; and Palestine became the central market between the kingdoms of Egypt and Assyria.

But with such prosperity and luxury foreign influences, such as ever surrounded the Hebrews from first to last, prevailed against the sternness of their Law. A kindred race had long prospered on the narrow shorelands under Lebanon, and had colonised the western islands, and built cities even in Greece. They were traders whose fleets covered the Eastern Mediterranean, and found harbours between the flat reefs, in small ports at Tyre, Sidon, Beirut, Gebal, and Arvad. They were famous for their purple dyes, for their chased metal-work, their masonry and statues, their roofs of Lebanon cedar, and above all for their simple alphabet, which now began to be adopted all over Western Asia, and even in Greece. They were allies of the Hebrew king, who brought their craftsmen to adorn his palace and temple. The small fane which stood in

its courts upon the ridge east of Jerusalem closely resembled the temples of Babylon and of Phœnicia. Its dark interior was covered by the unseen carvings of winged bulls, guarding sacred trees, glowing with gold, and roofed with cedar : tall bronze pillars flanked the embroidered veil of its doorway ; and a strange mingling of precious metal and white stone gave to this sanctuary that peculiar style which then prevailed in Western Asia. The palace that adjoined to the south had, in its Court of Judgment, an ivory throne with carved lions by the steps ; and Solomon, like the priests and rabbis of much later times, transgressed the law against images, and so sank slowly back to superstition, raising in his old age rival shrines beyond the Kidron gorge, to all the idols of surrounding tribes, —to Moloch, who delighted in the sacrifice of children ; to the licentious Ashtoreth ; to Milcom of Ammon, and Chemosh of Moab, with menhir stones, and sacred trees, and statues of many gods. So even at the zenith of power the seeds of future decay were sown, through the persuasions of foreign queens and of Phœnician priests.

The civil organisation of the kingdom was now completed : for Joab had shown that rebels were no longer safe even in the high mountains of the north, where he subdued Abel, the city of Naphtali. Twelve provinces answered to the twelve lots of the tribes of Israel, and sent tribute in kind—oil, wine, and corn, sheep, oxen, and fatted fowls, the roebucks of Carmel and Gilead, the fallow-deer of Tabor ; while tributary kings beyond the borders of Israel sent embassies and presents.

With art and trade letters also flourished in the new kingdom, and Solomon himself is said to have written proverbs and songs, and lists of beasts and of trees and plants. Before his time we hear little of the art of writing among Hebrews, though their tablets of the Law were as old, we are told, as Moses' age. David had sent epistles, perhaps on clay tablets like those of the Canaanites, and such tablets were still used in Judah four centuries later. Scribes recording Hebrew history, in annals like those of Assyria, appear in Solomon's reign, though Samuel had already recorded the Law of the kingdom

in a book—a scroll or tablet. In Egypt and in Phœnicia papyrus was grown, and long had been in use for written scrolls. It may have come to Solomon from the Tyrians, whose alphabet Israel adopted, and it is natural to suppose that, in this famous reign, the traditions and early laws of the Hebrews were first collected in a royal record-house.

The great Torah or “teaching,” which stood by itself as the sacred Law of the race, thus first perhaps was compiled from older writings on clay. It began with those ancient traditions of Creation, Eden, the Flood, the Tower of Babel, which are no mere copies of any known Chaldean tablets, but represent the native oral teaching, known perhaps already to the first Hebrews before they crossed Euphrates. It included the geography of an age when countries far distant were well known, through wide trading relations rather than by conquest. A geography extending from Caucasus and Ionia on the north to Yemen in Arabia on the south, and from Persia on the east to Egypt and Libya on the west. It recognised three great races — namely, the

fair Medic and Greek Aryans in the north; the Semitic peoples of Babylon, Assyria, Cilicia, and Arabia, connected by blood and by speech more nearly with the Hebrews than any other race; and the strong stock of Canaan and Egypt, akin to the earliest dwellers in Chaldea and to the sons of Heth. The traditions of the Patriarchs and of Moses followed in order, these various episodes being perhaps copied from scattered tablets of earlier date, the distinction between them being still sometimes traceable in the great compilation. To these, again, were added the early laws attributed to Moses, and the minute ritual of priests, which claimed to rest on his authority, but which was formulated either by priests of Shiloh or by the new order that served the new temple in Jerusalem. Such laws claimed to refer to desert life, when Israel gathered round a sacred tent. They never spoke of any temple in Jerusalem; and their archaic rites were often unsuited to the conditions of settled life in Palestine. Some of the oldest indeed suppose possession of cornlands and vineyards, which no Hebrews owned

until the conquest of Gilead and Bashan. But never do they describe the customs or rites of a captive nation, under masters of another faith. They foretell the fate that was to overtake a disobedient people, the bondage due to the power of such invaders as were already desolating Palestine in the days of Joshua and his successors. Yet the Hebrew is throughout represented as a recent conqueror, owning slaves and captives, and destroying the tribes of his promised land. The later trade, which brought cotton and silk and mules and poultry to his country, had not been founded when the Law was written, for none of these things are therein noticed. The magnificent summary of civil and sacred law, as modified when the desert was exchanged for the settled lands, when the central shrine was distant from the farther tribes, and when it was no longer possible to kill every sacrifice before the door of the "tent of meeting," as in the wilderness, closes the Torah, and describes the duties of the king. It selects and repeats the more important not only of the older civil laws, to which it adds others, but even

of the rites which formed a code for priests. It includes not merely the "ten words," and the traditional story of the desert life, but the lists of unclean beasts and birds given in the ritual, adding to the desert fauna the names of other beasts which lived in the woods and mountains of the land of promise.

To trace the various sources of this great compilation has, for more than a century, been vainly attempted by European scholars. Their ever-varying theories are based on the scepticism of the eighteenth century—a scepticism which was the outcome of revolt against the dogmatism of Rabbis and of priests, but which was ignorant of the antiquity of letters and civilisation in the East, and unfamiliar with the customs and scenery of the land where the Scriptures were written. The results of such study, unchecked by any independent evidence from without, based on the assumption that the Hebrews were mere savages amid savage foes, and that history traced back only to the days of the later Greeks, are now controlled and often refuted by deeper knowledge of the ancient records of Asia, which so often

illustrate and confirm the ill understood but faithful words of Hebrew authors. The future study of the Scriptures will rest on a truer foundation and more perfect sympathy. Their wonderful records, which have been torn in pieces to maintain the false theories and pedantic systems of the past, will be recognised as works of genius, which could never have been conceived by the small minds of mere compilers, or by the dishonest priestly forgers, whom some have thought capable of penning, for their own ends, the eloquent pages of Deuteronomy and the lifelike stories of Genesis. The Torah, it is true, contains much that Moses could not have written, and it only attributes to his hand a few passages, such as the "ten words," the Song, and the Blessing; but as a whole, it represents the teaching of which he was the author, not that of later days when Israel was once more in bondage. It is written in the pure Hebrew of earlier times, not in the corrupted dialect of Ezra's age. It contains none of those Greek and Persian words which crept into use after the captivity in Babylon; and, as far as the

various versions—Greek, Syriac, and Samaritan—are evidence, its text has been preserved with anxious care, a few small glosses and copyists' errors alone being detected by the careful students who pore over pages thirty centuries old.

To this Law, which, as a later writer assures us, was already the written Law of Solomon's age, other rolls or tablets were added during his reign. The history of the conquest, which quotes as existing that "Book of Jasher" which also included David's Song of the Bow: the traditions of the Judges, including Deborah's Song; and finally the vivid story of the reigns of Samuel, Saul, and David—the last of the early Hebrew annals, and perhaps the most remarkable. Early psalms of David, and in praise of Solomon, songs of the Temple, and pious meditations, were also collected, and pithy proverbs, some of which were copied later by Hezekiah's scribes; but the most unique of these writings was the bridal ode of a Syrian princess, which bears the title of Solomon's Song of Songs.

The criticism which regards this beautiful

poem as the work of a later age, because of two or three words, perhaps miscopied by a later scribe, takes no account either of the picture of Hebrew life that it contains, or of the references to all parts of the kingdom—to the chariots of Pharaoh, and the gardens of Engedi, the flocks of Gilead, the lions' dens of Hermon, Amana, and Lebanon, the pools of Heshbon, the dusky copses of Carmel, and the towers of Damascus and Jerusalem, or the fair lands of Tirzah, which are so natural in Solomon's age. Such love-songs had already been penned in Egypt. The Hebrew love-song found its place in a literature which, as time went on, grew ever more intent upon the Law, and upon the teaching of priests, and more suspicious of freer thought,—not only on account of its beauty, or of its supposed mysterious meaning, but because of its high antiquity, and its connection with the greatest reign in Hebrew history.

In Solomon's Song bride and bridegroom answer each other, with the endearments of a lawful love, but with the modesty and purity which we seek in vain in most Eastern

poetry of passion. The love of nature, and of the varied scenes of various regions, is expressed in a style unequalled, save perhaps in some of the Psalms of the same age, or in the book of Job. The memories of absence, of dreams and longings, of first meetings and later happy days, are mingled with the bridegroom's praises of the princess from Lebanon, whose brown cheek was brighter than the pale olive faces of the town ladies of his own royal city. She was the flower of the plains, and the wild tulip of the deep gorges, the wild dove in the nooks of the stepped crags. Her eyes within her veil are the dark eyes of the wild dove: her gleaming teeth are like the white lambs, fresh washed and even: the silver discs of her necklace are heroes' shields on David's armoury tower. And in reply she, in her dream,—while, as in all dreams, the scene shifts and shifts, so that she is now wandering in some strange city by night, then meeting, then again losing, the absent lover,—speaks of his likeness to a precious statue of ivory and gold, marble and jewels. She remembers how first he came, swift as a roe bounding

up the mountain-slopes, as she watched him through the lattice; and the song he was singing as though for her:—

Rouse thee, my dearest ! come away, fair one !
Winter is over now, spring showers are past.
Flowers are seen on earth, song-time has come.
Hark ! 'tis the turtle-dove's voice in our land.
Fresh figs the fig-tree bears, vine-shoots are fragrant.
Rouse thee, my dearest ! come, fair one, come !
Dove in the cliff nooks, on rocky terraces,
Show me thy face thy voice let me hear.
Sweet is thy voice, and comely thy countenance.
They have caught us foxes, fox-cubs wasting vine-
yards
And our vineyard blooms.

In another passage, while jealously ad-
juring the daughters of Jerusalem, who may
perhaps be keeping her lover from her, she
suddenly sees him return:—

Who is coming from the desert like the dusty whirl-
winds,
Dripping myrrh and incense and all merchants' scents ?
Lo ! his couch—'tis Solomon's. Sixty heroes round it.
They are Israel's heroes : swordsmen trained in war.
Each one sword on thigh, for a night-alarm.
Lo ! King Solomon's litter, all of woods from Lebanon.
He has made its pillars silver, and its floor of gold.
Purple its cushion, lovingly fitted by
Daughters of Jerusalem.

Come and gaze, O Zion's daughters! on King Solomon,
With the crown wherewith his mother now has crowned
him,
On his wedding-day, the day his heart is glad.

The bridegroom in his turn describes how
first he saw her in the country of her princely
father Amminadib :—

“Who is this that shines as dawn, fair as the full
moon,
Bright as the hot sun, awful to look on?
To nut - orchards I went down, seeking fruits by
streams.
Found myself unwitting 'mid chariots of Amminadib.
Turn, turn, peaceful one! Turn, turn, let us see thee.
Why gaze ye on the peaceful, when the hosts are
wheeling?
Fair are thy shodden feet, daughter of Amminadib.”

And thus in the end she follows him from
the orchard lands, coming up from the wil-
derness to a country of villages among the
vines :—

Seal me seal-like on thy heart, as the signet on thine
arm.
For as strong as death is love, wrath is hard as hell.
Fiery lightnings are the flames in the midst thereof.
Many waters are unable love to quench.
Nor can rivers drown it.
Though man give his house's substance, all for love,
he cares not.

Such was Solomon's wedding-song, standing alone in Hebrew poetry, presenting the picture of an age of peace and happiness, such as was never more known after his reign, to the degenerate Hebrews, when the kingdom was rent asunder.

V.

PROPHETS.

A FOOLISH son followed the wise king, and the kingdom was rent in twain. Four centuries of war and discord followed, till the Hebrews ceased to be a free people, and the great ideal was shattered. To scholars the study of these annals may be of interest, and the small discrepancies of ten or twenty years, due to the blunders of generations of copyists, may furnish matter for ingenious suggestions, astronomical calculations, and weighing of evidence, when other records from without are compared. To us, so long after, the names and succession of petty kings, the revolts and usurpations, the transient conquests and defeats, are of little im-

portance. They did not stamp the history of the world with any crucial events, or stem the great tides which overwhelmed the distracted Hebrew land, and changed the fortunes of the race. And thus the historian who, after the great catastrophe, collected from royal annals a summary of the events of these four hundred years, was right in putting forth his strength mainly to show the influence of prophets on his people, and the doom that came on a corrupted nation, because they would not hear the voice of truth, and sank back into the superstitions whence their Law might have saved them, were it not forgotten and despised—a tattered roll hidden in the Temple, unknown even to priests, and neglected by selfish kings.

The prophet was a seer who saw what was to come, a man inspired, who, when he was true to realities, and eloquent and bold, held power over the nation which neither king nor priest could claim. He was the champion of the poor, the judge of the rich and corrupt, the faithful witness to forgotten ideals. He might be prince or cowherd, learned priest or picker of miserable sycamore figs; but

when once the voice that made him not as other men had whispered in his heart, he was revered by all to whom truth and honesty yet were dear.

He stood beside the king and the priest, not as an enemy but as an independent critic, saying what they knew to be true but had no courage to perform, bound as they were in chains of custom and self-interest, surrounded by flatterers and schemers, by rich men who oppressed, and fierce ignorant mobs who persisted in their superstitions. Only two kings are named who had the courage to attempt reform in Judah : the one when a terrified people had seen their brethren in the north carried captive from Samaria ; the other when the terrible Nineveh had fallen to the fierce Scythians, who destroyed all ancient States, even harrying the west as far as Egypt. Asshur and Baal alike had been unable to protect their votaries, and Judah turned once more in fear to Jehovah, but turned too late, for the ancient spirit was dead among them.

Thus for the most part the prophets met the fate of all who tell unwelcome truths to

recreant nations. There were so many who assumed the rough mantle, and proclaimed peace when there was no peace, and visions that they never saw. So many fanatics and impostors, and dreamers who failed to see the future. Thus king and priest still held diminished power, and were escorted to their tombs with spices and incense, flattered in life, and proclaimed great after death, and then forgotten. The prophet was a prisoner in filthy dungeons, a fugitive in deserts, or a martyr slain between the altar and the temple. But his words remained alive. His name went ringing down the centuries, and is remembered still: for men must choose one of two paths—that which leads to power and danger, to fame during life, and to riches; or that other which leads, through poverty, neglect, and trial, to an undying renown in future days.

Such men are found among us even now, whose names may never be forgotten; but in the East the influence of these strange stern teachers, who set themselves against the shams and hypocrisies, the degrading superstition, and the ignorance of their times, was

hallowed by belief in that still small voice, which only spoke at times to one chosen as able to see and understand, and faithful unto death.

Read the bold words of the princely Isaiah, who was sawn in sunder; of Jeremiah the priest, who was called a traitor and sunk in the mire of the dungeon; of Hosea, who found the ancient shrine of Bethel defiled by human victims offered to calves; of Amos, who recalled the ancient traditions of Israel; and Micah, who denounced the wickedness of rulers. The courage of Isaiah saved Jerusalem, when the Assyrian tide lapped against its walls, when some counselled submission, and others looked to Egypt for help, and from their towers the trembling rulers looked down on those curled and oiled Assyrian mockers, and timidly asked them not to speak to the people in Hebrew speech. Isaiah despised their vain oblations, and denounced the idolatry of his nation in burning words: the greed of the rich; the luxury of women; the cruelty of the ignorant. He saw clearly the future ruin of all countries in the desolating wars of the time, and the injustice

rampant throughout all kingdoms. "For I looked for justice, and behold iniquity; and for righteousness, and behold a cry."

Read again what Jeremiah says of the spirit of religion: "For I spake not to your fathers nor commanded them, in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices; but this thing commanded I them. Obey my voice, and I will be your God." Compare what Micah says: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." The prophets of Israel were not merely mourners over the past, or dismal denouncers of woes to come. They were great teachers who might have saved a nation, but that they spoke to deaf ears, and struggled with a corrupted and luxurious society, which went to its fate as Rome went later when it forgot its ancient uprightness.

Meanwhile the ambition of kings, and the hatreds of nations, brought on the great catastrophe which involved the ancient world in ruin, and brought in a new age, new

powers, and new ruling races. Solomon died, and the friendly dynasty of Egypt fell before Assyrian conquerors intermarried with the royal race. No sooner was the news of his death known, in Egypt and Syria, than all his enemies strove for the possession of his prosperous kingdom. Shishak came up to sack Jerusalem, and ravaged all Palestine as far as Galilee. Damascus threw off the yoke, and became a separate kingdom. Jeroboam usurped the throne of Israel, leaving only the mountains of Hebron and Jerusalem to the king of Judah. And while generation after generation was involved in petty civil wars, the great cloud of Assyrian power loomed ever darker and darker in the north. The Hittites of Carchemish—Solomon's allies—fell first. The great Syrian league was broken near Hamath. Damascus was besieged and taken, and the conquerors enslaved the Hebrews of Bashan, Gilead, and Galilee. Yet nearer came the tide, when Samaria was stormed and Israel borne to captivity. The mountains protected the last strongholds of Judah, as the armies of Sennacherib swept through the plains to Egypt.

Tribute and submission saved for a time the petty power of Manasseh, when Assyria rose to the zenith of prosperity, and became famous for wealth and art and literature under her latest kings.

But the prophets foresaw the ruin about to come upon the "bloody city" of Nineveh, when Scythian hordes poured from the Caucasus over all the west, and broke in pieces the empire. A new power arose in Babylon, and Nebuchadrezzar became the master of the western world in Asia. Jerusalem was burnt, the ancient temple destroyed, the ark taken captive with kings, priests, and princes, and the history of Hebrew freedom closed in blood. Yet Babylon was mistress of a ruined world for only sixty years, and the new order arose when a race as yet unknown to history came west from Media and Persia, to establish for a time justice and peace, and to bring in a new faith, new manners, and a less intolerant rule.

The chronicler who tells us most of these events, so far as they affected his native land, has, however, also preserved the popular traditions, as to prophets who lived and

struggled some three centuries before he wrote. Stories, we may be sure, that were not found in royal archives, but that lived in the memory of the people. Stories full of wonders such as all men then believed—as they still do now believe in Asia—to be occurring every day, when holy men lived their mysterious lives apart from their fellows. We see the grim figure of Elijah in his hairy mantle, coming from Gilead to reprove the successful Ahab, ruled by his Tyrian wife, and surrounded by bands of Baal prophets. We see him a persecuted outlaw in the Jordan valley; fed by the Arabs in time of famine, and drinking the muddy waters of the sinking torrent stream; sheltered by the Phœnician widow; and again gathering the famished people on the great crag of Carmel, where an altar of Jehovah lay in ruins. We witness the savage revolt from a Baal who gave no rain, the murder of his lying prophets by the Kishon, after their wild and desperate invocations had failed: the little cloud no larger than a hand, rising in the hot glare over the shining sea: the great thunder

pillars, piled over the mountains with “ sound of abundance of rain ” : the triumphant servant of Jehovah, running with flying unkempt hair, before the silver chariot of Ahab, to the vineyard city of Jezreel. Again we see him under the white broom in the desert, dreaming of angels, going back to the pinnacles of Horeb, which Hebrews no more visited : we read of his standing in the cave on the slope : “ And behold Jehovah passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before Jehovah. Jehovah was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake. Jehovah was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire. Jehovah was not in the fire. And after the fire a still small voice—

“ ‘ What dost thou here, Elijah ? ’

“ ‘ I have been very jealous for Jehovah the God of hosts ; for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thy altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword, and I, I only am left. ’ ”

We see again wicked Jezebel, doing to death the man who would not give his vineyard on Gilboa hard by Ahab’s house ; and

Jehu driving furiously up the long flat valley, to the tower on the hill where anxious kings awaited him. It was the revolt of Israel against the Tyrian murderess of prophets, whose desperate pride was still unquelled. She painted her face and put on her richest robes, and taunted the victor from the window, only to be dashed down by frightened eunuchs, her blood bathing the chariot-wheels; and we see her lying unburied in the street, till hungry dogs devoured all but the wicked hands and bitter tongue—all that was left of her to be placed in a hurried grave, where once that proud daughter of princes had worked her will unquestioned.

Cruel and self-seeking as any Baal-worshipper was the new usurper, who flattered the Rechabite hermit, and murdered priests and worshippers in Baal's temple at Samaria. But such reformation soon was abandoned, and the confusion grew ever greater as Moab rebelled, and Damascus recovered power, after Ahab's death. Mesha the tributary, who set free his Moabite deserts, was as convinced of the favours of Chemosh, before

whose altars he dragged the captive worshippers of Jehovah, as was Jehu when he seized the kingdom; and Jehu later on was forced to bribe the great Assyrian with presents and tribute.

We read how, in Damascus, a Hebrew girl was captive, but remembered the prophet of Galilee, who wandered between Carmel and his home near Jordan. The Syrian general comes to buy his cure from leprosy, with letters of commendation to the king of Israel. The hermit successor of Elijah bids him bathe hard by in the muddy river which he despised, remembering the bright dashing stream that runs between its poplars from Lebanon to water Damascus. We learn how venerable to the people was Elisha's figure, when the rich farmer's wife adds to her house in Shunem a little mud chamber, with a lamp and bed and table, where he may rest on his journey. We see the reapers in the valley, the only child sun-stricken, and carried to that little cabin. The poor mother hastening on her donkey on the wearisome plain, and up the stony slopes, to find the solitary among the green copses

of Carmel, falling in speechless sorrow to embrace his feet, and hurrying back again to find her child alive. These are but a few of many tales which tell us what the prophets were to Israel, and give life to the dry records of futile wars and slaughter.

The wrongs and terrors of that age of blood and trouble are best reflected, however, in the story of Job, which some forgotten poet has made for us the subject of a poem surpassing any other that Hebrew genius conceived. The problem of evil was very pressing on men's minds, in times when Providence seemed dead, and robbers prospered, and when the end and meaning of the great revolutions of the world were hidden from them. The answer of the Hebrew was one which still is true. Patience and trust in the necessity of suffering, and in the duty of right-doing even when all is dark, is the only answer that can ever be given. No ancient writer has ever placed such duty before his fellows in nobler words, or with such power and beauty, as has the author of the Book of Job.

The scene is laid in the wilderness of

Edom, and Job is an Arab prince like Abraham, rich in flocks and herds, and respected in the neighbouring city. We are told the reasons of his trial, which are never revealed to himself, and see the Satan—a recording angel who wanders over earth to spy out secret sins—entering the council on high, and doubting the sincerity of the good man yet untried. A short and passing tribulation is laid upon him—bitter while it lasts, with loss of children and wealth, of health, and friends, and power, but salutary to teach patience and submission, and to try his integrity.

Do not we all know Job's friends—the pious comforters whose dulness rubs the sore, when they would fain heal the wound? Their names remind us of John Bunyan's allegories—Mr Piety of Righthand, Mr God's love of Humility, and Mr Progress of Smoothtown. But the courtesy of their speeches, and of Job's replies, is obscured by our rough rendering in English: for the terse and nervous language of the poem is sometimes hard to translate. We see poor Job, covered with sores, sitting in dust, and

scraping himself with shards. His bitter wife tempting him to die. His comfortable friends coming, red-booted and turbaned, from afar, and hardly knowing the wretched beggar on the dunghill: sitting silent and astonished to witness his despair, until he speaks, cursing his day, and trusting not even in death, since wicked men dig up the tombs for treasure.

Piety's first speech is a model of orthodox consolation. "May one venture to speak without offence? for one cannot be silent. Thou hast taught many, and strengthened feeble hands: supported the failing with words, and stayed weak knees. But now it comes to thee, thou art faint. It touches thee too, and thou art troubled. Hast thou no trust in thy piety, or hope in thy integrity of life? Think, who ever perished that was pure? when were the upright ever cut off? I have always seen the ploughers of vanity, and sowers of trouble, cut down. By God's breath they perish, devoured by the wind of His wrath." "The lion dies without prey: the cubs of the lioness are scattered. But a word stole to me, and my ear heard a

whisper ; in thought, in night visions, when sleep had fallen on men. Fear and trembling met me, and made my bones to creep. A breath passed over my face, the hair of my flesh stood up. It stopped, but I saw no face or image before my eyes. Silence ; and I heard a voice. 'Is man more just than God ? Shall the greatest be made pure by his works ? Lo, He trusts not His servants, and sees His angels to be wrong. Yet more they who dwell in houses of mud, founded on dust. From dawn to eve they perish without end. Their tent-peg is pulled up : they die, and know not why.' " And so he continues to urge that fools only are punished. "For man is born to trouble, and storms will come." Prayer only is any use, and chastisement is good. Job has been prospered before, and may yet be comforted and healed.

But what comfort, says Job, is it to weigh and measure affliction ? Is he complaining without cause ? There is no hope ; and his friends are like a desert brook, where travellers hope for water and find it dry. They are happy themselves ; and it is easy then to

be pious. "Has not man a duty on earth, and his days are as a soldier's? The slave pants for shade, but the soldier expects work." Yet his lot is mere misery and despair, because of some unknown fault.

The second friend is shocked at such wild talk, reminding Job that punishment follows sin, that the schemes of the impious are mere cobwebs, and that no event is without its cause; yet kindly hoping that the future will be better, and Job's oppressors punished. But this is worse comfort than the former, and doubt begins to cloud Job's heart. All know, he says, that God is strong, but is He just? that He created the universe, but why does He slay the innocent? Weary of life, he dares to speak boldly, and declares that he is punished for no sin done. "Shall no remnant of my days be spared? will He not leave me a little brightness? Ere I go, to come back no more, to a land of darkness and shades, a land of gloomy darkness, without order, where light and dark are alike."

The third friend has less patience than the others with such bold speech, suspecting that

it hides some secret sin. "Thou sayest my verdict is just, let me be pure in thine eyes. But who gives God a word, and lets Him speak as well?" "And know so God exacts of thee for sin." "A common man is bold, and man is born a colt of the wild ass." He once more recommends penitence and prayer, that better things may come. It is only the wicked who are punished, whose hope is but a puff of wind.

Job's patience is sorely tried by such trite maxims. Even beasts and birds could teach us God's power; but the reason of all the misery which covers the earth is what he wishes to learn. "Lo! He ruins and none can build. He imprisons man and none can open. Lo! He withholds the waters and they are dry. He sends them, and the land is overwhelmed. His are strength and wisdom, victim and tyrant are His. He sends robber rulers, and foolish judges. He makes kings weak, or makes them strong, sending thievish priests, and overthrowing the trusty; closing honest mouths, and destroying the elders' judgment; pouring contempt on the honourable, loosing the strength of the

strong, letting forth secrets from darkness, and bringing shadows on light, increasing nations to destroy them, spreading the people and leading them to straits, taking away the courage of chiefs in the tribes of a country, and making them stray in a desert. They grope in darkness, and there is no light; and He makes them reel like a drunken man. Lo! my eye has seen all this, my ear has heard and known it: you know it, and I differ not with you. But as for me, I would ask the Almighty, and desire to reason with God." The evil of the times oppresses his mind, and his friends seem but special pleaders, speaking because they are afraid of God; but Job is desperate, and pleads that he is not guilty. Still some faint hope of the future, mingled with doubt, remains: some question whether another life may not compensate for troubles on earth. "For there is hope of a tree that is lopped: it blooms again, and its shoots do not cease, though its root be old in the ground, and its bole dies in the dust: at the smell of the rains it flourishes, and makes boughs—for it is a plant. But the great man dies and lies

low, and man expires, and where is he? Waters ebb from the sea: a river is burnt up and dries; and man lies down and rises not, nor wakes till the heavens are no more, neither rouses from his sleep. Would that Thou wouldest keep me in Sheol, and hide me till Thy wrath was past, and set me a time, and think of me. If a great man dies, shall he live? All the days of my service I would hope, till my new life came, that Thou wouldest call and I should answer, and that Thou wouldest care for the work of Thy hands." "Even a mountain falling comes to nought, a rock may be moved from its place. The waters wear the stones, the green things of the dust are flooded. But wilt Thou make the hope of man to perish? Thou wilt prevail over him at last; and he goes to the change, where Thou hast sent him. His sons are heavy, and he knows not: they are dejected, and he sees not: for his body aches upon him, and his soul is sad for himself."

This remarkable speech shows the much deeper thought of Job, contrasted with the narrow truisms of his friends. They have

nothing more to say, but to insist that wicked men will always come to destruction. Their speeches grow shorter and less convincing, as each argument is refuted in turn. Job's only hope is death, and union with those who have gone before. "My spirit spent, my day ending, do not the graves of my own mock me, and my eye lingers on their sorrows?" "They are gone from my day, my meanings are broken, the thoughts of my heart are fixed upon them day and night. It is a light amid darkness if I hope for Sheol as my home, to spread my bed in the dark. I have cried, 'Thou, my father, art in the grave; my mother and sister among worms.' What better hope for me? Who sees my hope? It is gone down to the bars of Sheol, if we may rest together in the dust."

Still they harp on the old string, that the wicked will fail, and the pious will prosper, till Job turns suddenly upon them with denial. The rich and unjust man, he says, often dies honoured and respected. The long procession follows him to his tomb; and none speaks aloud of his evil deeds: the raids of the wild desert-men on peaceful

towns, olive-yards and vineyards, are unchecked, he reminds these comforters, and every kind of sin and crime goes unpunished. At length they are silent, and listen to the words of Job, whose thoughts are more and more eloquently poured forth. Men seek, he says, in deserts and mines for treasure; but none asks the price of Wisdom. He recalls the happy days of yore, when as a merciful prince he was honoured, and confident in his future; and contrasts his misery, scorned even by thieves and outlaws, forgotten by his own kin, teased as a poor old beggar by the crowds of boys, too weak even to change his garments, and condemned by God: yet conscious of his integrity, and of a blameless life.

Thus all their talk has been in vain, and nothing is explained or set right. But now the younger man—the author himself—who has listened in silence, offers some better comfort, suggesting trust and patience, and hidden hope—a silver lining to the cloud: “For God is greater than man, why then contend with Him? for all you say He answers nothing.” “Once indeed, or twice,

maybe, He has spoken, though men did not understand, by dreams and visions at night, when sleep has fallen on men ; to stop a man from his deeds, and veil the pride of the great. He keeps his soul from some snare, and his life from the stroke of a weapon, while he is chastened by pain on his bed, and the struggle of his bones is sore, and his life loathes food, and his soul dainties ; while the flesh wastes visibly, and hidden bones are bared, and his spirit is near the pit, and his life near the slain. If there be above him an angel to excuse—one of many thousand, who can answer for his uprightness, and pities him, and says, ‘ Save Thou him from going down to the pit, for I find ransom for him ’ : then his flesh waxes fair as a child’s, he renews the days of his youth. He prays to God and is heard, and he looks up with exultation. He renders justice to men, he looks on them and says, ‘ I have erred, and have wrested right, yet there was no requital to me. He has freed my soul from crossing the gulf, and my life sees light.’ Lo ! such things at times God has done to the great.”

Elihu goes on to testify the goodness and

justice of Providence, and to preach submission. "He delivers the poor through poverty, and opens their ears through oppression." Even the storm that is rising to their sight in the desert has its reason, and gives rain on the pastures for the wild beasts, in a land where no man comes. So, too, the fall of kingdoms prepares new things that grow from the ruins. There is light behind the thunder-cloud, though men despair when skies are overcast.

And out of the storm is heard at length the voice of Jehovah, proclaiming all the wonders of creation, speaking of the day on which the corner-stone was laid "with songs of all the morning stars, and shouts of the sons of God"; of the sea, and the dawn; the light and darkness; the snow and hail; the rain that covers the deserts with grass; of the stars revolving round the pole; the Providence that feeds the lion's cubs, and the raven's young, and cares for the wild does in their pangs, and the fawns in the outlands. It pictures the wild asses racing over the plains, and the wild bull who scorns the yoke; the stork in the marshes; the ostrich

wiling the hunter from her nest in the sand ; the war-horse impatient for battle ; the bright-winged hawks flying to the south as winter comes, and the eagle soaring for prey ; the elephant spouting in great rivers, and the crocodile lashing the lake to foam. Who may contend with the maker of all these marvels, silent while men babble, and dispute, or boast ?

So Job is answered, and sees the smallness of his thoughts, and folly of his doubts. No reason is given to man, nor is the Satan shown us penitent for his disbelief in goodness. The good days come again when trial is over, and the dull friends are made to know their ignorance. We have risen high above any thoughts of sacrifice and ritual, of a god who haunted local shrines or royal temples, to the conception of a Spirit of the Universe, knowing His own hidden purpose, silent, all-powerful, and all-caring. The little deeds of man are nothing to the great designs of One whose body is space beyond its farthest stars. Like autumn leaves men are swept by the whirlwind, and scattered in the clay. Yet nothing is lost, and all that

is is right. No book, penned by either Hebrew or later poet, surpasses in the power of its thought, in the wonders of its imagery, in its love of nature, and contempt of wrong, in its sustained argument, or in its deep humility, that which the evil days of the Assyrian tyranny gave to all time, under the figure of Job, the "persecuted" but upright chieftain of Edom.

VI.

EXILES.

THE fall of Jerusalem was a shock from which the Hebrew nation never recovered. They ceased to be an independent people, or to play a great part in the political history of the world. The whole character of their existence was changed, and the national life ran henceforth in new channels. The lower classes, who were probably not of pure blood, had never strictly followed the law. Images were in use in Saul's time, and even earlier. The "high places" were destroyed by Hezekiah and Josiah; but they remained throughout the shrines of the peasantry. When the city was taken, the common people, who had probably always looked on

Jehovah as a local sun-god, traced their misfortunes to neglect of the worship of the Queen of Heaven; and a century earlier the Assyrian envoys appealed to their prejudices, by asking them whether Hezekiah had not destroyed the altars of their tribal God. When Jerusalem fell, and priests and princes were carried captive to Babylon—a crowd of possibly thirty thousand in all—the peasantry, whose numbers had been thinned by war and pestilence, famine and murder, were left without guidance, and were overwhelmed by new colonies, from Syria and Assyria, Edom and Arabia. They mingled with Philistines of Ashdod, and forgot their ancient pride of race as Hebrews. Thus the nation as a whole ceased to regard itself as distinct, and to preserve its ancient faith. They became the “people of the land,” whom priests and rabbis in later days shunned and despised.

Among the captives in Babylon, who had been great landowners and priests proud of their pure descent, two tendencies arose, which ever since have existed in Israel. The few, who saw in their disgrace a punishment

for idolatry and sin, set themselves to reform their faith, to study their Scriptures, and to prepare for a future which they read in the scrolls of their prophets. The many lost hope in any future restoration; and, submitting to heathen power, they sought to enrich themselves by new means, as traders, merchants, and usurers. Hebrew names appear, soon after the Captivity, in Babylonian tablets that record trading transactions; and commerce scattered this class all over the Babylonian empire, so that in time the "dispersion" reached the steppes of Russia, and extended to Greece and to Egypt. Hebrew literature suffered henceforth from such great changes, and a servile people produced at best dry commentaries on ancient books, and imitations of the past. The later psalms of Israel show us the decay of genius that accompanied the loss of freedom, and priestly rules succeeded the thought and poetry of earlier days.

The change is seen at once by comparing the writings of Ezekiel with those of older prophets. Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel was a priest; but while to the former the eloquent

rhetoric of Deuteronomy chiefly appealed, to the latter the ritual laws were more important. It is true that scholars tell us of an unknown prophet in the days of Cyrus, whose pictures of a happy return to Zion are not inferior to Isaiah's pages ; but, with this disputed exception, the prophets of exile, and of the return to Jerusalem, rarely attain the ancient level of thought and word. Ezekiel was not less intent than Isaiah on the events of his own age, but less clearly foresaw the outcome of the struggle among nations. He expected a great Scythian raid, like that which desolated Asia in the reign of Josiah, to be about to burst from the Caucasus ; but history does not record any such outbreak. The power of Media and Persia was not foreseen. The disasters prophesied for Egypt did not come till much later than Ezekiel expected. He bewails the ruin of Tyrian trade, and draws a vivid picture of her merchant princes. But Tyre, which had already sent out her great colony to Carthage two centuries before, rose from her ruins to become a source of strength and wealth to her Persian rulers. In the time when Ezekiel was a

captive beyond the Euphrates, Tyre was obstinately opposing Nebuchadrezzar, and for thirteen years she kept his armies at bay. The island city had fleets of Lebanon fir, with oaken oars from Bashan, and benches inlaid with ivory. She traded with Egypt in linen for the sails, and with Cilicia for red and purple awnings. Her native sailors had voyaged to the pillars of Hercules: her mercenaries were brought from Persia and Lydia. From Tarsus came the ores of Cappadocian silver-mines, and iron from the Chalybes, near Caucasus. Ionia and Armenia furnished slaves, and bronze vessels, horses, and mules. Precious stones came to her from Syria; corn, honey, oil, and balm from Palestine; wine from Hermon, and white wool from Damascus. Even Indian spices were brought by Arab caravans, with gems, and flocks from Edom. The trade of Assyria and the north had its outlet to the Great Sea at Tyrian ports, and the rude tribes of Italy and Spain obtained from Carthage, and from the mother city, the products of the ancient civilisation of Western Asia. The Phœnician became the chief trader of

the west, and inherited the wealth that Solomon had drawn to his capital.

Ezekiel's mind was occupied, however, less with the fate of other nations than with the sins and punishment of his own people. He saw in vision the temple at Jerusalem profaned with the rites of Tammuz and Ash-toreth, full of carved images and sacred trees, and of apostate Hebrews worshipping the sun. He anxiously expected the fall of the city, which came to pass only too soon. But even he was subject to the influence of heathen art, and unconsciously his imagination was wrought upon by the carved panels of Carchemish and of Assyria, in cities which he passed, or where he lived a captive. His vision of cherubim, supporting the throne of Jehovah, recalls to us the art of Phœnician gems and Babylonian sculptures. The God of hosts rode no longer on the cloud, or spoke from the whirlwind, but, like Asshur or Shamash, was borne on His throne, or in His chariot.

But Ezekiel never despaired of the future of his race, and kept alive the hope of restoration when all others lost courage.

He saw his people, as it were, dry bones, in a valley of slaughter ; but, behold, a breath of God was to stir the clattering skeletons, till bone joined to his bone, and they arose a mighty army. A new Temple, more glorious than that of Solomon, should be built, and a new division of the ancient kingdom among the tribes should be made, from Hamath to the deserts of Edom. A new nation of priests, observing all the ritual law, should rise instead of sinful kings, and all Israel should be gathered home—a righteous people at last. The ideal so set before the race saved them from utter dispersion, and in some small measure was realised by Ezra the scribe. But the full accomplishment was never attained, and no free Hebrew State ever rose again.

For sixty years the exiles served their Babylonian masters, and then the face of Asia was changed by the new race of conquerors from Persia. A nation of shepherds and ploughmen had grown up on the Volga, akin to European rather than to Asiatic peoples. It had spread along the Oxus through Bactria, had reached India on

the east, and had driven the earlier Elamites from Persian plateaux. It had pushed through the Caucasus into Media, had driven back Assyria to the plains, and finally helped to ruin Nineveh. It brought with it a new religion, and a love of truth and justice which had died out among the earlier nations of Western Asia. The long acquaintance of Jews, in Babylon, with Persian thought and fancy was not without its results on the teaching and expectations of later Jewish schools. But equally were the Persians in time subjected to the strong influence of Babylonian civilisation, which so far surpassed their own simple culture.

According to the Persian creed all nature was divided into two hostile camps. Genii and men, animals and plants, were distinguished as either good or bad, as creations either of the "all wise being" or of the "mind of wrath." The pious believer must not only nourish the good, and show his kindness to animals as well as to his fellow-men ; but he must also destroy every noxious or loathsome beast, as well as every wicked unbeliever. The code of sacred law, written

in the pure language, which so soon was corrupted by foreign words, and at a time when money was unknown, and conquests in the west had not begun, came to Babylon with Cyrus, and spread westwards even to the shores of Ionia. It was accompanied by hymns to the great angels of the supreme God, to holy fire and water, to the sun and the dawn ; but the Persian had as yet neither temple nor image, nor any fear of foreign gods. Strange customs were preserved, such as the exposure of the dead in towers of silence, where vultures picked the bones that were gathered later for sepulture ; and painful precautions were taken against pollution of earth, fire, or water, or of man himself, by any dead matter or other impurity. The Persian ritual included that offering of sacred Haoma drink, which was mystically said to be the body of Mithra, the God of Day. What drink this was in earliest times is little known, but perhaps the Iranians of the Caucasus, who still make their libation of beer, have preserved the oldest form of the rite. The Haoma was as distinctive of Persian faith as were the sacred grass, the

sacred thread, and the sacred shirt of the faithful.

Many of these new rites and ideas became diffused in later times among Jews and Romans ; but, yet more, the Persian looked forward to the rebirth of his prophet from a virgin mother, and to his return after a time of trouble with a host of pious followers, raised from the dead, and having in them the fire of immortal life. The Hebrew, like his neighbours, had looked on the future as an eternal life of ghosts, in the dark caverns of the under-world. He had never as a rule expected any resurrection on earth. Isaiah and the author of Job had dimly pictured a happier fate for man ; but the idea of such a future of saints, reborn or raised, to live for ever in a holy land, arose among the teachers of Israel, to comfort them later in their days of failure and desolation, centuries after they had learned from Persian legends this new teaching of immortal life, which spread with a new and strange religion, over a changed world and a powerful empire.

VII.

PRIESTS.

THOUGH Magi might demand zeal for the faith of Zoroaster, the new conquerors of Asia were tolerant of religious differences. They came to inherit, not to destroy, their empire. Cyrus, according to the Babylonians, worshipped their gods Bel and Nebo. The great Darius allowed the temples of Egypt to be rebuilt, and the Jews equally obtained freedom of worship.

Thus in the first year of Cyrus many captives returned, under a descendant of their ancient kings. Some forty thousand of the richer and more religious went back to fulfil the ideal of Ezekiel. There is nothing incredible in the number, for in

our own times forty thousand Jews have, in a few years, found their way back to Palestine. But there were many who had no interest in the matter: for some held that not until a priest or prophet stood up with the Urim and Thummim—the ancient stones of divination that were lost—would it be right to fulfil prophecy. How could a temple be rebuilt when there was no ark to put within? The vessels of the sanctuary were as nothing without these sacred emblems. Some thought that Palestine was no longer habitable. Some preferred to live as traders among the heathen, and to receive their sixty per cent in lending money. Some had intermarried with other races, and believed in friendship with stronger nations. The zeal which led the followers of Zerubbabel to take a long journey to their ancient home was not common to the nation at large.

And on their return many disappointments awaited them, when they settled in Jerusalem, and in the villages of Judah and Benjamin round about. The influence of priests, whose faith was not

that of Persian governors, was very different from that which they had exercised of old. The first year witnessed a famine, piously ascribed to some delay in building the Temple. They sowed, and reaped little: the vines were barren: the wages earned were put in "a bag with holes"; for tribute and taxes, and presents to the governor, swallowed up their gain. The Temple when built was sadly mean and small, so that old men wept who yet remembered the glory of the former house. Priests were already intent on controversies as to the exact fulfilment of ancient precepts, as to the precise purity of meats and drinks, and details of impurity, when all the nation was unclean. It was indeed a "day of small things," and Israel envied the wealth and prosperous trade of Tyre. They trusted that it was but for a "little while" that they should thus be powerless and despised. A time was to come when kingdoms would fall, as they had fallen before, and all who did not come in autumn to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, with the blowing of rams' horns, the making of

booths, the pouring of libations, and torch-light dances in the Temple courts, would be punished by Jehovah. But the city remained a ruin, and Israel waited for the great day for which they still wait now.

Moreover, there was no zeal or uprightness among the greater number. They were treacherous to one another, they cheated the Temple by offering the worst of their flock or herd. They failed to pay tithes—perhaps had little left to pay with when the Persian tax-gatherers were satisfied. They lent to their brethren, and exacted usury contrary to their Law, and took the poor as slaves, and seized their lands. Against all this their new prophets protested; but their priests began to interfere in family life, to insist on divorce from foreign wives, and thus brought in a source of social weakness that still mars the life of Eastern Jews, among whom no wife and mother feels secure in her home. For forty years they languished, feeling the failure of their hopes, and hindered by their enemies, the “people of the land,”

who "weakened their hands." The Temple was finished at last, but the city unbuilt.

Forty years again dragged out their days till Ezra came—a scribe learned in the Law, and zealous to explain its teaching: for the old Hebrew language was dying out, and save among priests it was little understood: the Aramaic dialect of common speech had taken its place, and the Scriptures must be explained therein. Even priests wrote bad Hebrew, and did not fully understand the ancient books; but the Law of Moses, as it now was called, was very sacred in their eyes. They copied it in the later crabbed characters which had grown from the older Phœnician alphabet, but they dared not alter a word or even a letter. They dared hardly pronounce the name of Jehovah, and soon forgot its sound. Their comments and enlargements on their text, if they were written at all, were kept quite separate, save for a few notes on the margins of the sacred scrolls, which sometimes crept into the text of later copyists.

The great events of the world were

happening outside Palestine, and only heard of from a distance. Under Xerxes the forces of Asia were hurled against Greece. The subjects of Persia from India to Ionia, and from Caucasus to Arabia, were gathered in that famous army which Herodotus has described. The traders of Tyre and Sidon sent their fleets to help, but the wave dashed against the rocky shores of Europe, and recoiled, leaving the power of the King of kings discredited; while the old Persian honesty was sapped by a luxury surpassing that of Assyria in its proudest days; and each reign was more tyrannous and corrupt than that which it followed. The Jew-hatred, which was due to usury and unfair gains, grew up in Persia. A favourite with a private grudge against the Jew persuaded Xerxes to exterminate the exiles in the East. A Jewish maiden, whose race was unsuspected, had entered the royal harem, and found favour with the king. Her influence alone saved her people, and the "Day of Esther" was ever after commemorated at the winter feast of Purim.

The great catastrophe in Greece made it, however, politic to reconcile distant subjects to the Persian sway, and about ninety years after the time when the first exiles returned, a Jewish governor was appointed at Jerusalem. In him we see some of the ancient spirit, for a few years, revived. Honest and patriotic, full of energy and sympathy, zealous to re-establish the Law, the ancient feasts, and the Sabbath rest, Nehemiah, during his two terms of office, did more for Israel than any priest or rabbi. "Think upon me, my God, for good," he cries again and again, "according to all that I have done for this people."

He tells us how, in his heart, he resolved to rebuild the fallen city. How he went out on his mule by the ruins of the western gate, and down the dusty valley by the dunghills, and over the south slopes above the Hinnom gorge, and by the desolate orchards of Siloam to the east, where tower and rampart had been hurled into the narrow ravine of Kidron, under its yellow cliffs, below the chalky slopes of Olivet. Here were piles of hewn stone,

leaving no place for his beast to pass, and so in the moonlight he went back to the governor's house. The news soon spread that the walls were to be rebuilt, and all the foes of Israel were wroth, or sneered at the "feeble Jews." They threatened accusations of rebellion, they plotted to murder Nehemiah, or to assault the workmen at their work. But his courage never failed, and fallen masonry, gates burned with fire, and towers overturned, were cleared and rebuilt, and the ancient city restored, as it was when Babylonian conquerors had ruined it with fire and sword. The wrongs of the poor were redressed: usury was punished; and the presents which Persian governors had exacted were refused. The Law was read in the streets, the Tyrian fish-sellers were denied a market on the Sabbath. Strange wives were put away; Moabites and Ammonites separated from Israel; and for a little while the old Hebrew spirit seemed to be revived. But the change died out with the man, and for two centuries and a half the history of Israel is a blank, because neither was foreign rule utterly

unbearable, nor did the nation give birth to any truly great man.

For the new narrow spirit tended to schism, not to unity: the rule of priests was what it always has been, unfitted to sway the destinies of a race when uncontrolled by statesmanship and tolerance of belief. Purity from the least legal defilement was all in all to them. Tithes and sacrifices were the first duties of the people. They despised and shunned the "people of the land," and said no peasant could be righteous. His doom was to die like the beast that perishes, or like the heathen; and the future was to be for a pure Israel, when the day of small things passed away. Thus more and more they separated themselves as a sacred caste, surrounded by the pious who had leisure to observe the ever-increasing scruples of obedience. Their influence grew ever narrower, and lost more and more the spirit, in insisting on the letter, of the Law. The poor in villages and outlands was left to himself: tormented by famine, usury, and disease: robbed by Persian tax-gatherers: enslaved by landowning Jews, or greedy

traders: worshipping as of old his stones and trees, his Baal and Ashtoreth: tilling the land for others; and bearing heavy burdens to the towns: untaught and unpitied, merely a "beast of the people." It mattered nothing to him who ruled the land, when he had no longer any voice in his own fate. He could not read the ancient words of comfort and hope, which were hidden away in priestly archives. He could not observe these laws of cleanliness. He had no heart to rejoice at feasts as of old. He lived by himself, and hoped only that Baal would send the rain, and Ashtoreth let his flocks increase; that some desperate man would murder the governor, and the king be persuaded, or frightened, into sending a better; that the wars would not come through his village lands; and that the usurer would delay sending him to the fever-stricken prison. The lost sheep of the house of Israel were scattered on the mountains, and no shepherd came.

Schism among priests yet further separated the nation. The Samaritans say that Sanballat the Horonite was a Hebrew, who

brought back Israel to Shechem just as the Jews returned to Jerusalem. Their priests, descended from Aaron, were sons of those who had come back to teach the mingled colonists of Samaria how to worship Jehovah, when they were devoured by lions. The Jews said that some kinsman of a Jewish high priest founded the rival shrine on Gerizim—the ancient Mount of Blessings. Certain it is that this family of priests preserved the Law of Moses, and yearly held the Passover according to its oldest form—eating with loins girt and staff in hand—upon their sacred mountain, at the city where first Israel had raised a sanctuary of Jehovah. But such rivalry was hateful to the priests of Jerusalem, and all the central province of Palestine was decreed no longer part of the Holy Land. No Jew might have dealings with any Samaritan. The house was divided against itself, and bitter accusations were exchanged between the rival schools, whose sacred centres were but a day's journey apart.

Weaker and more corrupt and tyrannous became the Persian rule, until, about two

centuries after Cyrus, the great figure of Alexander of Macedon appeared in the north. Along the narrow marshy plains, under the steep mountains near Issus, the small Greek army came round the Gulf, towards the Gates of Syria. The huge disordered hosts of the great king awaited them on the upland plain to the east. They saw him pass the valley, by which the great road led to the sea, and believed him caught in the snare. But Alexander turned to meet them fiercely at the valley mouth, where no broad front could be opened out to surround him. Their own numbers encumbered them, as they shrank back from the savage Macedonians. They fled far east, and trampled down their fellows. The dark hills of Issus saw the decision of a quarrel which changed the history of Asia.

Tyre on its rocky island held stoutly out for the Persian. The genius of Alexander prevailed against it after a murderous seven months' siege. The narrow sandy isthmus, which joins the city reefs to the shore, covers the long causeway of stones and trees, which Macedonians built to reach the island,

under fierce assaults from the Phœnician mercenaries, and the fires of the burning ships launched against the mole. The walls were stormed, the citizens massacred, and a swift cavalry raid on Damascus laid all Syria and Palestine at Alexander's feet. Unopposed except at Gaza, he marched through the plains to Egypt, and founded the great city that bears his name at the Nile mouths. Jewish writers tell us that he visited the temple of Jehovah, and revered their ancient high priest. At least he spared the Jews, for whom he founded a quarter in Alexandria; and the tide of conquest rolled away to the east, leaving new states under Greek rulers behind it. To Arbela near Nineveh the great soldier marched, and smote the Persians and their elephants, and followed the highway to India, pursuing rebels far north to the Oxus, crossing the high ridge of Hindu Kush, descending through the passes of the Himalaya, passing beyond the Indus to defeat the kings of Hindustan, and labouring back to Babylon, through the great desert by the Indian Ocean, where even cattle were fed on fish, and the weary

army depended for its very existence on the fleet built in India.

And thus at length the he-goat of Macedon butted to death the Persian ram, and the master of men was obeyed from Greece to India, from Nineveh to the Nile, and died in his youth at Babylon, and his kingdom was divided. But in these great events Israel had no share, and submitted to another heathen lord—unable to strike a single blow for freedom. A new capital was built in the valley of the Orontes, close to the oleander groves of Daphne, on the highway of trade under the heights of Amanus; and twenty-two years after the victory of Issus in the plain to the north, the era of the Seleucidæ marks the beginning of a new chapter in Jewish history. Palestine became the borderland between the Ptolemies in Egypt and the Greek kings of Antioch in Syria. For nearly a century after Issus it belonged to Egypt, and then was taken from her by Antiochus the Great. But throughout these two centuries and a half, from Ezra to the defeat of Egypt at Banias, Israel is without a history and without a prophet.

Meanwhile, in distant lands events were ripening on which the future of the nation depended — especially to the west in Italy, and in a lesser degree to the east in India. The great daughter of Tyre had reached the zenith of her power, and fell under Rome just before the victory of Antiochus the Great. Her fleets covered the Great Sea, passed beyond the pillars of Hercules, brought tin from those unknown islands of the north, the way to which across the stormy Atlantic was the secret of Carthage. For a time it seemed as though Phœnician power was to govern Europe through mastery of the sea. But the rich traders, who spoke a language so like Hebrew, found in the mingled Latin and Etruscan race of Rome a stubborn courage greater than that even of victorious Greece. The Aryan and the Arab races clashed together in Spain. The great leader, whose name, Hannibal, reminds us of the gratitude of a Phœnician mother to whom “Baal was gracious,” carried his elephants across the Alps, and washed his horses’ feet in wine in the Italian vineyards, and failed at length because a jealous republic at home

would not stretch out a hand to help him, when but three days' sail lay between Carthage and his army at Capua. The ghost of a hero, forsaken by his people, haunted the shores of the Euxine, where, blind and neglected, he perished in his old age by suicide, regretting only the joy that Rome would feel to hear that name of terror no more. In the great struggle for life, and for mastery of the sea, Rome was victorious at last. She cleared the eastern waters of pirate fleets, and already her shadow was creeping eastwards to Greece and to Syria.

About half a century before the defeat of Carthage a half-Greek king in India was sending forth, to Persia and the west, not only ambassadors to princes, but teachers of a new faith, born from the troubles of an age of war. The missionaries of Asoka penetrated through Persia, and settled in the valley of Antioch. They brought with them the mild and sad teaching of the Buddha, and sought that "way of escape from sorrow" which was his message to men. Touching and beautiful was the legend of that prince who grew up lapped in luxury, and shielded

from knowledge of misery, happily wedded and father of a son. Who in his childhood had never heard of pain or poverty or death. Who saw the vanity of his life, and fled to the forest to learn wisdom. Who listened to all the false philosophies of his time, and saw that they were futile. Above all, who dared to tear away the bonds of caste, and the hopes of his creed, that he might at least stretch out a hand to the wretched, and show them that "way of escape from sorrow" which he thought he had found at last.

"Right thought; right words; right deeds," he preached, as all great men before or after him. This was his "narrow path." But what more had he to tell that could comfort miserable man in those dark ages of war and wrong? Sympathy he could show, but how could his message help? We feel that something is lacking when the "way of escape" is pointed out. Man, he said, must cease to lust after any human desire. Wealth and ambition, even love of wife and kin, he must cast behind him. He must not trust in any god, or trouble himself about things unknowable. His duty lay close by him.

His future was the outcome of his daily deeds. But all his troubles rose from desire, from coveting that which was worthless, and loving that which could not endure. The Buddha's teaching raised around him troops of friends in his last days, and sent mild and zealous missionaries all over Asia. It lay at the root of Stoic teaching in Greece, and influenced the white-robed Essene hermits, who had all things in common, who shunned cities, and lived in caves in the stern desert of Engedi, who abandoned the sacrifices, and adopted the baptism of India. It spread even to Theban deserts, where Therapeutæ were the forerunners of monks. But it created only hermit orders who renounced the world—a quietism which in time lost sympathy with the people. The great founder was exalted, till his giant images, his teeth and nails, were adored, as idols of a triple god, and relics of a virgin-born saint. The superstitions of Asia overgrew the teaching of compassion and truth which he proclaimed, and of the thirty millions who repeat his name to-day there is perhaps not one who understands the master's message.

Such were the great events of this long period, while priests in Jerusalem grew ever narrower in thought and practice. Their writings were but dry summaries of past history, penned to show their own importance in Israel, or new rules of purification to fence them round from pollution by the heathen or by the dead. The songs of the Temple, like the Temple itself, had lost the ancient glory. The prophets were silent. The psalms of Ezra's days were echoes of the past. The romance of Esther was written to extol a fallen people as still a chosen race. Even the "Preacher," whose language is no longer ancient Hebrew, puts his philosophy in the mouth of a son of David who had been king in Israel.

This book of Koheleth is the most remarkable that the age produced; but it is the utterance not of an aged king, but of a nation in its old age of decay. Its theory of life is not unlike the theory of Buddha, but it was the natural outcome of servitude under foreign rulers. The Preacher has tasted the vanities of the world, and counsels contentment and an upright life. He looks back on

the past, and sees that all things repeat themselves. The world goes round, and that which has been is again. There is a time for all things, but nothing endures. He has tried mirth, and work, the gathering of riches, the study of science, the practice of pious rites, and all is vanity. He sees worldly men prosper, injustice rampant, rulers tyrannous, priests greedy, seers with false visions, women corrupt, and the wicked in power. He sees superstition hindering useful work and trading ventures. He believes that none can fathom the secrets of creation. He looks forward only to a dark Sheol where all is forgotten, and where no hope of future life exists. The only true pleasures are youth and health, the love of wife and child, before the miseries of old age overtake man. But these also must pass, for all is vanity. An upright life is the only consolation for old age. There is no new thought or feeling after truth in the Preacher, such as the book of Job presents to us. It is a warning to the young, but one which many had given before, and which was not often laid to heart. It is the voice of the man saddened by the evils

around him, and unable to do any great deed to amend them, because his people were subjected to stronger races, and had ceased to believe, or to hope for a future. Yet, excepting the dry chronicles, the tattered memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah, with comments of a later compiler whose knowledge of history was faulty, and some few psalms and stories, this was all that the Hebrews could now add to the great library of their fathers, while they remained without a history under kings of Persian and of Greek races.

VIII.

PURITANS.

THE subtle influence of Greece was spread over Western Asia by Alexander the Great. The palmy days of Athens had ended a century before ; but now the Greek language was heard in Bactria, and Greek plays were read by Parthian kings. The successors of the conqueror spread Greek civilisation in Syria and in Egypt ; and even Israel came under the spell of Greek customs and thought. The beauty of Greek language, the excellence of her art, and the greatness of her philosophy, could not but attract a people of like genius though of older culture. Who could fail to see how poor and childish were the Egyptian pictures, and Assyrian bas-

reliefs, compared with statues by Phidias? Who that could read would fail to admire the poems of Homer, the plays of the great dramatists, the thought of Plato, and the knowledge of his disciple Aristotle, who had been the tutor of Alexander himself? The manners of the Greeks in Antioch were copied by the younger generation of Jews. Even priests of Jehovah attended the Grecian games, and rivalled each other in subservience to the house of Seleucus. Greek architecture was copied; Greek philosophy was studied; and under the learned Ptolemies even the Law of Moses was rendered into Greek. Had such a movement been left to take its course, the Jews might in a few generations have been merged among other peoples.

The revolt of the puritans was brought about by Antiochus the "brilliant," or, as Polybius calls him, "the frantic." Usurping his nephew's throne, his boundless ambition aimed at conquest in Egypt and in Persia alike. But Rome already claimed to interfere in Asia, and to protect her allies. Called in by Athens, she had conquered Sparta and

Epirus, had defeated Antiochus the Great, and had extended her friendship to the Ptolemies. The army of Antiochus Epiphanes was stayed at Alexandria by Caius Popilius Lænas, who commanded the King of Syria to return to his own dominions.

Baffled and enraged, Antiochus revenged himself upon his Jewish subjects. He swore to extirpate their customs; and, on pretext of settling the quarrels of their priests, he plundered the Temple of Jerusalem, enriched by a former Ptolemy. Two years later he sent his general to put down a "pestilent people," and utterly to efface their native customs. He was himself engaged in war with Persia, and died miserably at Tabæ near the frontier; but the cruel orders that he left behind him aroused the spirit of desperate revolt among the few who yet were faithful to their ancient beliefs.

Thus at length Israel was roused from centuries of silence. Their Law was abolished, their sacred Torah torn in pieces. Circumcision was forbidden. The Temple was defiled, and consecrated by Greeks to Zeus and Aphrodite. The boar, which was

a peculiar offering to the Syrian goddess, was sacrificed upon the altar of Jehovah. A fierce persecution raged against all who failed to submit to the forced conversion of the nation; and an intolerance unknown before desolated Judæa. But little had the Greeks counted on the zeal and courage of the puritans who still existed in Israel. Rival high-priests might court the royal favour, or might fly like Onias to Egypt; but in the villages the Law was still a reality, and Mattathias, a Levite of the first course,—the family of Joarib,—surrounded by his five stout sons, first dared to strike a blow for his faith at Modin, the little village on the hills near Lydda, which has become a sacred centre to every devout Jew of to-day. The Greek envoy was slain on his idol altar, and the flame of puritan zeal was lighted when Israel once more gathered against the heathen at the old centre of Mizpeh on the mountain.

Three times did Judas Maccabæus, son of Mattathias, defeat the armies of Antioch. He hurled them down, like the Amorites of old, from the Bethhoron pass. He cut

them off at Emmaus near Ajalon, when they took the road from Joppa. He smote them at Bethzur, when they came round by the south. For three years he kept Jerusalem free from all the armies sent against him. He restored the Temple, and cleared its courts of all the bushes that had grown round the deserted fane. He took away the swine-polluted altar, and laid up its stones in a chamber, until a prophet should arise, or priest with Urim and Thummim, to say what must be done with that which had once been holy.

Again at Adasa, in the cold winter month of "Esther's Fast," he met another army from Bethhoron, and overthrew it. The feast of Purim marked again a second deliverance of Israel. He lived to see the hated oppressor die in torment, and then perished in stubborn defence of the last pass that guarded a road to Zion, along the way from Shechem. For a while the puritans seemed to be quelled, and fled to the desert of Judah, and the jungle of Jordan. But discord in Antioch gave them further chances, under the "wary"

Jonathan, brother of Judas; and gradually they regained all that Judas had conquered, in Palestine, in Edom, in Bashan, and in Galilee. The Greeks had penetrated, even in the time of Maccabæus, by the southern passes to the capital, when Eleazar—fourth of these famous brothers—had fallen under the elephant within sight of the city. They had left a garrison on the north hill of Jerusalem, which Judas cut off and surrounded. The efforts of the puritans, for many years, failed against this last stronghold of the Greeks in Judah.

Even the wily Jonathan was at last deceived by the usurper Tryphon, and captured at Accho, and slain in Gilead. But Simon, an elder brother of Judas, succeeded: he met the Greeks even in the plains, with well-furnished forces; he freed the sacred city from the foreign garrison; and in his old age, twenty-six years after the revolt of Modin, was recognised as “Ethnarch,” or local prince of Israel, by the decaying power of the suzerain in Antioch. Murdered at length near Jericho by domestic treachery, he was succeeded

by a yet more powerful son, John Hyrcanus, whose zeal was checked indeed for a while, when the Greeks once more besieged Jerusalem, which Hyrcanus surrendered. But Parthian wars drew away the oppressor, and the conquest of Edom imposed Jewish religion on its Arab tribes, while on the north the rival temple of Shechem was destroyed, and Samaria captured.

During this period of revolt, and of half-recognised independence, two schools of thought arose among the Jews. Sadducees and Pharisees became parties that divided the nation, now that the influence of Greece was for a time abolished. A political change was also brought about, even before the death of Judas, which deeply affected Jewish history. The power of Rome had been shown in Greece, in Syria, and in Egypt; the fame of her victories in Spain, and against Carthage, which was finally destroyed by Scipio within the lifetime of Simon, pointed to the great republic as a powerful ally, and an enemy of the kings of Antioch, who would surely help those who rebelled against the Greeks. The

first alliance with Rome was made in the year when Judas fell, and it was renewed by his successors often after. Who could foresee how fatal to the family of the Asmoneans (so named from Hasmon, grandfather of Mattathias) would be this treaty with the future foe of Israel? For a time at least it served to strengthen the puritans, and to secure the family of Simon as friends of Rome.

The Sadducee was the old-fashioned Jew, who saw in his Scriptures nothing more than was written therein. He regarded the promise of prosperity as clearly meant for the pious on earth. He expected only the future that his fathers believed in: an endless abode in the dark caverns of Sheol, where all is forgotten in the slumber of the "long home"—the rocky tomb. He was rich and contented, and held that the prophets had spoken of things which long ago had come to pass. The present was good; and only when another prophet arose would it be needful to think of the future. The Sadducee "persuaded none but the rich," and the poor and ignorant looked

to other teachers. He was a "pietist" or "puritan," but not an enemy of those whom he left to their fate as "beasts of the people."

The Pharisee was a "separatist," whose zeal was directed by the traditions of priests who had handed down the teaching of Ezra. But his study of the prophets, and passionate imagination, added to the dry ritual of the Law a hope, in future glories for Israel, that fired the fancy of the people, and painted new pictures of a wondrous time to come. He had pondered on the Persian teaching which Jews in Babylon had learned. He saw in the prophets not mere political forecasts of the fate of Egypt, Assyria, or Babylon, but visions of a time to come, not yet fulfilled, and promise of a future king of Israel born, not like Asmoneans, of the tribe of Levi, but of the royal race of David. He taught that in the end of days a resurrection of the pious would follow terrible troubles; and that, while the heathen perished for ever, the saints of Israel would reign a thousand years over a Holy Land, where every valley

had been exalted, and every mountain and hill brought low.

The power of this new school threatened the family of Hyrcanus, who claimed indeed to be both princes and high priests in Israel, but had always expected a prophet—not a king—to arise, who should decree the future government of the land set free by Judas. In his last days John Hyrcanus took into favour those Sadducees whose opinions favoured his house, and during twenty-six years of the rule of Alexander Jannæus his son the Pharisees were held in check. But their influence with the people was strong, and the princely house was falling fast under the old influence of Greek culture. Greek legends on the coins of Jannæus were added to the Hebrew lettering of his father's money, and guards of heathens—Pisidians and Cilicians—surrounded his person. The Syrians of Bashan, and the Syrian king of Damascus, aided a revolt against him, and when he again conquered his throne he crucified eight hundred of his enemies, and died a hated tyrant. By his advice the wise Salome, his wife, made

terms with the Pharisees, and so ruled Israel peacefully for eight years more, in the name of her weak and degenerate son John Hyrcanus the Second.

After her death the miserable brothers, Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, quarrelled for the priesthood. But meanwhile Rome had conquered all Armenia to the Caucasus, and under Scaurus, one of Pompey's generals, Syria was annexed, and the disputes of the Asmonean brothers led to Roman interference. Pompey himself besieged Jerusalem, and entered the Temple; but spared the great treasure which had once more been gathered in the ancient fane, during the prosperous reigns of Simon and his son. Hyrcanus was established as priest, Aristobulus graced in Rome the most splendid triumph that Italy as yet had seen, and Palestine was divided into petty provinces.

Henceforth even the semblance of freedom was lost. The true emblem of Rome was the rapacious eagle, soaring ever higher, and looking farther. Her ambitious generals were greedy of wealth; and favour was only

gained by bribes. Pompey and Cæsar alike were covetous of money, and Crassus their friend no longer spared the sacred treasures. When marching to his fate in Parthian deserts, he visited Jerusalem and took two millions of our money from its treasury, not long before his mouth was filled with molten gold by Parthian mockery of his greed. By Pompey's order the miserable Aristobulus was poisoned, and Alexander his son beheaded, as friends of Cæsar; and soon the great quarrel of the rival masters of the world led Jewish rulers anxiously to watch the chances of strife. Pharsalia followed, and Pompey's headless corpse was washed in the breakers off the Nile mouths. Hyrcanus his friend trembled in Jerusalem, and Cæsar was awaited with fear.

Such was the last puritan revival that succeeded, for a century, in preserving the Hebrew faith, and in some measure restoring freedom. But the Roman world was full of evil and cruelty, and the great Hebrew ideals of the past had sunk to miserable disputes over the lawfulness of eating eggs laid on the Sabbath. The wisdom and beauty of Greek

culture were forgotten for a time, and rude warriors from Italy despised the ancient memories of fallen peoples. Luxury had not yet sapped their strength, though they too were destined as a future prey to savage nations. Wealth and conquest occupied all their thoughts. Whither could the oppressed turn for comfort, when priest and prince among them alike were weak and treacherous, and even the great Asmonean house had fallen in ruins?

It was then that a new hope was whispered abroad, taught by Pharisees, and trusted in even by the people of the land. The Messiah was their only hope for the future. A king once more must free the Hebrews. Not a priest, but a son of David—the “branch” of whom the prophets had spoken. Mysterious allegories were penned by a people who dared not openly proclaim their hope. Only a “little while” and the heathen would fall by their own swords, and the “desire of nations” would come. Very different expectations were held as to his person. Some only expected a king, who might be preceded by a prophet. Some thought that from the

Lake of Galilee would rise a divine form—pre-existent, and re-born, like the Persian prophet, of a virgin mother. Some said he would rule within the present age. Some told of his coming in clouds after a judgment-day, at the resurrection of the dead heroes of Hebrew story. But none doubted that when he came all Israel would know and welcome him, and none but Israel would remain to serve him for the thousand years to come. Lowly at first perhaps, and seated on an ass; but already, in the caverns of the ocean, angels were quarrying gems to build his palace and his city. Visions of the future, with hidden allusions to the wild beasts and eagles who tormented the flock of Israel, were penned under the names of Daniel or Enoch, were written even in Greek hexameters by Jewish priests in Egypt, in the name of the pagan Sibyl. Men read of a flood that should overwhelm the sanctuary, and of a temple to be destroyed; but their hearts rested on this mysterious hope in a Son of man who, above all Hebrews, was to be also a Son of God, and of whose kingdom there should be no end.

IX.

R A B B I S.

ANTIPATER, a chief of Edom, helped Cæsar when he marched on Egypt, and soon reaped his reward. Made first a Roman citizen, while miserable Hyrcanus was left as Ethnarch, he became after three years the ruler of Palestine. The government of Israel fell to the Arab of Petra, and Esau was revenged on Jacob. See this proud son of the Edomite favourite—Herod, the friend of Cæsar, the conqueror of Galilean robbers, scorning the Sanhedrin amid his guards. Already the fate of all the Asmonean house looms in the distance. Cæsar is murdered, and the Jews bewail a conqueror who spared them; but Herod is not dismayed, and

hastens to curry favour with the lean and hungry Cassius, the new pro-consul of Syria. The plotting nephew of Hyrcanus poisons Antipater, but wily Herod is betrothed to the niece of this Antigonus, and so makes peace for a while with his father's murderer. Cassius fails, and Antony becomes powerful in Asia, and Herod bribes him to bestow real power in Palestine, where Hyrcanus retains only the shadow of authority. No change in the shifting fortunes of others seems to shake the cunning Idumean from his purpose.

But Antony has met the witch-queen Cleopatra in her galley on the stream of Cydnus, and has forgotten empire in the pleasures of Egypt. The wild bowmen of Parthia have broken through the frontier guards of Syria, and ride in thousands over the plains to Jerusalem. How wicked and treacherous the younger Asmoneans have become is seen when Antigonus joins these new invaders, and cuts off the ears of Hyrcanus his uncle, that he may no more be high priest in all his life. The fortune of Herod seems to fail at last, as he flies from

Jerusalem to the great rock of Masada, and leaves his women in this desert fortress on the borders of Edom, to seek the aid of Antony in Egypt. Antony is in Rome, and the witch-queen tempts the Edomite as she had tempted Cæsar, and will try still later—with fading charms—to tempt Augustus. Herod in Egypt only makes a bitter foe. But on to Rome he follows his patron, and gets help to win back Galilee at least. Ventidius has driven out the Parthians, and Antony orders Sosius to help his friend to conquer Jerusalem. A seven-months' siege reduces the city, and Antigonus falls into Herod's power, and Antony again is bribed in Antioch to put him to death. Meanwhile the proud and fair Mariamne, rescued from the desert, is wedded to the man who is about to kill her uncle. The wretched Hyrcanus, taken a captive to Babylon, and kindly treated there by Jews of the dispersion, returns, but can no longer be a pontiff, or even come before the altar, with his cropped ears, according to the Law. A Babylonian deputy is set up; but the Jews still look to Asmonæans for their priestly rulers. The beautiful

youth, Mariamne's brother, is appointed, and received with such great joy that Herod's jealousy is at once aroused. He is drowned in the bath, and the murder is called an accident. But Herod has made another foe—the mother of Mariamne and of her brother—and Cleopatra has found an ally in the very household of her enemy Herod. He is cited to Syria to answer the charge against him; but Antony again is bribed to take his part, even against the witch-queen herself.

Twelve years have flown since Herod's accession, and other dangers menace him. The great quarrel has broken out between Augustus and Antony. Actium is fought, and Cleopatra's courage fails so that she flies, leaving her lover to defeat, by loss of her fleet. Herod is hindered from the war by home seditions, and finds his Arab enemy in league with Mariamne's mother, and with Hyrcanus, whom he puts to death—an aged man of eighty. But surely now his fate is sealed when his friend Antony is dead? Not so: for Herod resembled no one else so much as the unfrocked priest of France—Talleyrand, who ever deserted his patron in time.

The crafty Edomite could claim that he had stopped the gladiators of Antony marching to help him in Egypt. Augustus he hastened to meet at Rhodes, and nourished his army at Accho on his road to the south. He returns in triumph, ruler of all Palestine and Edom, and regains his balsam gardens of Jericho, which Antony gave the witch-queen, not content with Greece and Cyprus, Crete and Syria, Phœnicia and Cilicia, her lover's presents when he could give kingdoms to whom he chose.

Not yet has Herod reached the zenith of his power, but already the crimes and woes of later days are gathering round the tyrant. Mariamne the beautiful and proud, with bitter tongue, had foes in Herod's mother and sister, who compassed her destruction. The Asmonean faction was still his greatest danger. Even Mariamne must die that Herod may be safe. The ghost of the last of her house haunted the palace of her murderer, and in vain he sought to banish her memory, and preserved her corpse in honey. The peace of the empire left his power unquestioned; and Palestine was

covered with new cities and temples. No longer did he attempt to hide his utter indifference to the Jewish creed. The Zealots failed to compass his death, and he flung himself into the Roman world, as one who equally honoured all the gods of Augustus.

Ascalon, his birthplace, was beautified, Samaria and Cæsarea were built, with temples to the Emperor and hippodromes and theatres. Throughout Syria, and even in Greece and her islands, Herod lavished money on theatres and heathen temples. He endowed the Olympian games, and those of Athens and Sparta. He sought even to reconcile the Jews, by corn brought from Syria in time of famine, and by remitting taxes. He built a splendid palace in Jerusalem, with cedar roofs, and gardens full of bronze statues and flocks of doves. But in vain was even the great Temple of gleaming marble, with golden vine, which towered above the new courts and classic colonnades; for on its summit he set the hated symbol of Rome—the golden eagle with its outspread wings. Not through zeal for Jehovah was

this mighty work begun, for its builder had also written his name on the shrine of the Arab sun-god in Bashan, and on the temples of Augustus in cities of the Holy Land. In spite of all his pains to flatter a people whose high priests he set up and deposed at his will, the tyrant was hated for abundant reason. Had he not utterly cut off all the Asmonean house? Had he not desecrated the holy city with theatres, and games, and shows of gladiators? Were not his wicked images standing in the gardens of Sion, and his eagle over the sanctuary? Was not all he did for his own honour and profit? Was he not striving to Romanise all his kingdom? Men are not so blind as to mistake a crafty hunter after popular favour for an honest benefactor of his people.

Even the sons of Mariamne were sent to Rome, and were wedded, the one to a heathen priestess of Cappadocia, the other to an Edomite cousin. Antipater, the eldest of Herod's children—pure Edomite by birth—was given to the charge of Agrippa, who married the dissolute daughter of Augustus, and whom Herod so eagerly welcomed to

Jerusalem, and went even to the Black Sea shores to visit. The younger brothers, who still traced back to the Asmonean house through their murdered mother, were educated by Pollio, the heathen tragic poet.

The servile policy of Herod was plain enough, and enemies arose ever afresh among his subjects, and in his household. Even Augustus was weary at length of his cruelties, when Mariamne's sons were brought to their fate and strangled at Samaria. But the most cruel blow to Herod's closing years was the discovery of the deep plots of Antipater, the son for whom all this was done. Letters forged by a slave-mistress of this vilest of his family, to do Salome to death: suspicions that his brothers had perished through like forgeries: poison prepared to rid the kingdom of his own father; and plots involving all whom Herod had trusted and loved.

Thus closed, amid scenes of blood and torture, treachery and crime, the forty years of Herod's reign. The dying tyrant was carried through the Jordan wilderness, to bathe in those hot sulphurous springs which

run among the palm-groves in the great gorge of Moab. Was borne back dying to the plains of Jericho, and in his pain and fury sought by suicide to end his wretched life. He died in time to save the trembling priests and elders, whose massacre he ordered in the last moments of life. The long procession bore his bloated corpse, amid clouds of incense and spices, up the white chalk ridges to the conical hill on which the round tower of Herodium enclosed his tomb. Savage Gauls, and Thracians, and Cilician mercenaries surrounded his bier ; but none lamented him save the hired mourners, whose shrill cries echoed through the desert. And close beside his tower sepulchre, the little village of Bethlehem contained a rocky stable by its inn, wherein a Hebrew child was born that year, whose name alone has spread the memory of Herod's cruelty over all the world, which else would long have ceased to care to hear the story of his fate.

The rich inheritance fell to none of those who had plotted so long for Herod's kingdom. Archelaus and Antipas, born of a Samaritan wife, divided his dominions—the one in the

south, the other in Galilee and east of Jordan. Archelaus was banished within ten years. Antipas followed him thirty-three years later. Judea and Samaria were thus at length directly ruled by Roman Procurators, but Galilee by Antipas, during the time that Jesus of Nazareth lived His short life in Palestine, when Herod was no more. The reign of Antipas was sullied by the murder of the new prophet, whose cry in the wilderness brought all Judea out to hear the message of Messiah, and of the kingdom about to come. The greater crime that followed lies at the door of the Roman governor, who crucified Messiah to save his own ill-earned authority.

We turn then from the history of selfish ambition, crime, and sin to look upon that white-robed form with auburn locks, and kind brown eyes, which stands in the dingy synagogue of Nazareth, before the swaying crowd of Jewish worshippers with veils upon their heads, and leather boxes bound on hands and foreheads, which hold the finely written parchment charms culled from the Law of Moses. The burning words of Isaiah have fallen from His lips in the ancient

Hebrew of the days of freedom; and in the more familiar speech of Galilee He adds the startling comment, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."

Who is this who dares to speak in His own authority, and not as the Scribes? Is it not Jesus the carpenter, son of Joseph and Mary? Do not we all know his parents and his brothers? How may a young man, even though learned in the Law, even though a rabbi and a follower of that new prophet from Jordan, dare thus to speak before his elders and teachers? What will the priests say of the strange new comment on the Law, which is not given to us as derived from either Hillel or Shammai, or handed down from the men of the great synagogue of old? The Golden Rule is well enough, for did not Hillel say, "Do nothing to thy neighbour that is hateful to thyself"? But who may dare to call the rabbis blind leaders of the blind: to say that their traditions have made the Law of none effect? No harm perhaps in secret fasting; but much danger in despising the Korban. "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for

the Sabbath": what dangerous heresy may not this conceal? Why do His disciples not perform the lawful ablutions? Why do they do a work on the Sabbath by grinding the corn-ears in their palms? Miracles no doubt He may be able to perform: for all holy rabbis can walk on water, and heal the sick, and even raise the dead at times, and fly to heaven to listen to the voice behind the veil. But can a holy man eat with sinners, and speak to peasant women, and yet be favoured with the gifts that only are given to saints? Truly there is much doubt, and reason to fear that a sore scandal may arise in Israel. Some have whispered that this new teacher is a son of David, perhaps Messiah himself. But could Messiah come from Galilee? It were well to wait, and hear what our teachers have to say.

Not long they waited. The priests have cast Him out of the synagogue, and the angry mob have nearly stoned Him down the cliff. But what of those who loved and followed Him, when He went out doing good, and preaching the kingdom of

Heaven? Was it as a god that they revered Him? He called Himself "the Son of man." Was it as a Greek philosopher asserting mysteries? He never studied Plato or Zeno at all. Was it as a Zealot calling them to overthrow the Roman rule? He bade them "render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's." Was it as one about to be a king? He said, "My kingdom is not of this world." Or was it as a teacher of a new religion? He said that all the Law must be obeyed. What, then? They loved Him as a friend to all the friendless. The brother of the poor and hungry, the oppressed, the sorrowful, those who with Him were "despised and rejected of men." Why did He call them blessed whom all other holy men despised and shunned? Because He knew the words of old, "He saveth the poor through his poverty, and openeth their eyes by oppression."

And like the rabbis He taught them in parables, with simple words which all could remember, though few could understand their real meaning. His similes were taken

from scenes familiar to them all. The story sank into their minds, though their wits were slow to comprehend. The sower was casting his seed on the red corn-lands, though some fell on the path, or among stones and thorns and thistles, and some the sparrows stole. The hidden treasure they all knew was buried in earth, because of robbers by night, or greedy governors. The vineyard with its watch-towers covered the slopes near Nazareth. The net was hurled by the naked fisher, in the waters of that mountain lake, which imaged the precipices of great gorges down which the sudden storms were wont to rush, and whip its waves into foam. The city set on a hill was shining above in the sunset flash, while the dark shadows stole up from plains beneath. Lilies in purple glory, like the Phœnician robe of Solomon, covered the graveyards. Lazarus, blind and ragged, sat ever at the gate of Roman Dives in his shady villa. The white robe was never seen in the new cities of Tiberias and Sepphoris, which Antipas adorned with pillars and carved images of the heathen,

but only in the mud cabins by the lake, or in the solitary desert of Gadara, where naked maniacs lurked in caves. And what was the message that He brought to these poor tillers of the soil and rugged fishermen? Was it a "way of escape from sorrow" by apathy and contempt of the world? Alas! that lesson was taught by an iron experience already. He preached a better time to come, but not in this world. He told them that the greatest of commandments was Love. It was but a grain of mustard-seed to-day, a leaven in the mass of pain and wrong. Yet it was the salt of the earth, the light of the world, when all was foul and dark. He saw the lost sheep of the flock of Israel scattered on the mountains, and none to seek them, or to bind the broken limbs. He saw a people oppressed by usury and greed, tortured by fever and eyesores, maddened by sunstroke, or faint with hunger. He had pity on them; and He laid His finger on the cause of all this misery. Not merely vain lust for power and wealth, but want of human love. He placed a child in their midst,

and told them that only as children could they enter His kingdom of the future. He watched the widow drop her mite into the Temple poor-box, and the Pharisee drawing together his robes, lest they might brush against the publican who stood afar off, in the Court of Gentiles, smiting his breast. His wrath was kindled only by hypocrisy, ingratitude, and injustice—the cheating steward, the bribed judge, the merciless servant.

Not only in Galilee, or on the banks of Jordan, the little band of humble friends followed the Son of man. Even among the hated Samaritans he walked, and told to Jews the story of the man who lay upon the red-stained rocks beside the road to Jericho, and priest and Levite passed by, and only the accursed Cuthean had mercy. He stood beside the well of father Jacob, while the veiled woman of Ischar drew water for Him. “Rabbi, how is it that thou, being a Jew, dost speak to me, a woman of Samaria? Our fathers worshipped God upon this mountain, but ye say that in Jerusalem alone should Jehovah be sought?” The time was

nigh when neither at Shechem, nor on Sion, would any temple of Jehovah remain for sacrifices and feasts. When God must be worshipped by sea-shores, or streams, and even in prisons, or before the cruel mobs of amphitheatres filled with naked victims and savage beasts, or at best under the desert sky. Even the men of Ischar might understand His message; though from Ischar came the man who should betray Him.

The foolish country rabbis sought to puzzle Him with questions in the Law. "Whose wife in the resurrection," said Sadducees, "is she who has had seven husbands on earth?" They sought to entangle Him with that vexed matter of the tribute to Rome; but what had He to do with the shifting fortunes of placemen of the empire, or with the plots of Zealots, and the schemes of Herodians? He saw only the erring son—Israel, eating husks among the swine, having wasted his substance in riotous living; and Jehovah ready to take him home again, when penitent and humbled.

Passover in March fell in a season of cold and storm, when the clouds lay on the hills,

and the pilgrim roads were deep in the mire. And down the stony path from Olivet we see the Galilean pilgrims coming to the feast, while Jerusalem was already crowded, and many must wrap themselves in their cloaks, and sleep in the gardens or under the olives. Who is this rabbi, with auburn locks and kind brown eyes, seated on the ass, and coming like the king whom prophets foretold? Surely Messiah has come this year at the feast-time? The crowd are casting down their cloaks in His path, the children wave their palm-boughs; and up the steep hill they pass into the Temple courts, with songs and cries of Hosanna. How little like the Temple as it should be was Herod's half-Greek sanctuary. A chattering crowd pressed on the pious their cheap sacrifices, with hidden blemishes, as Israel passed within the posts on which were carved in Greek public announcements, that it was death for any but a Jew to enter, and so on towards the upper court guarded by priests, where the black smoke from fig-tree logs rose on the rubble altar streaming with blood. The tables and boxes of money-

changers filled the outer cloisters, where men of Jerusalem offered bright new shekels, at a modest charge, for the old money from the country which none might give to priests. The feast was made a time of gain. The sacrifice was a bargain. The Father's house was a den of thieves. The zeal of that house has eaten Him up, as He drives this huckstering crowd out of the gate, and rules for a moment Lord of Temple and Sabbath.

Caiaphas and Pilate were much alarmed. The favourite of Sejanus, who was favourite of Tiberius—of Sejanus, Pretorian Prefect and joint-consul of Rome—had bought his place, hoping by a few years of exile, among these ignorant Jews, to reap a fortune, and retire to some fair villa in Italy. But nothing except trouble had marked his period of office, and now it seemed not very unlikely that again he would have to mingle the blood of worshippers with that of sacrifices. Caiaphas, his henchman, heard of the mob who hailed Messiah. Who but Caiaphas would be the first to greet Messiah if He ever came? But would He call the pious Pharisees blind leaders of the

blind? Would He appear from any little village of the north rather than from Bethlehem, the home of His house? Would He steal in upon a priesthood unprepared, and in a time when Romans could be bribed to keep the Sadducees in power, and Annas from the coveted high priesthood? The danger must be met with prudence, and the new fanatic arrested by night, for fear of uproar among this huge excited Passover mob.

Four days have passed, and now the little company of friends have met in some poor upper chamber of the city to eat the Passover. Is their master—hailed but yesterday as son of David and Messiah—changed and exalted? He washes their feet as a servant. Is He expecting the overthrow of Rome by Jewish zeal? He tells them that before the cock crows at dawn all will have left Him and fled. The paschal lamb, slain for men, is but an emblem of Himself. The broken bread His broken body. The “cup of blessing” is His blood of a new covenant with men. The bitter herbs and sour sauce are gall and vinegar which He must taste. So

the last supper of His Passover is eaten in sorrow, rather than with joy. The ancient rite which Israel had known for fifteen centuries, since first they hurriedly performed it with girded loins and staff in hand, has a new meaning henceforth to His friends, in the sad words of farewell, "Remember Me."

The Passover psalm is sung, and through the silent streets where lights still shine, and voices still raise hymns within, they pass to sleep on the cold ground under the Kidron olives. The drowsy friends are wakened by the glare of torches, as guards of Caiaphas surround their Master. And all forsook Him and fled. Yet not all, for one rude fisherman follows afar, and ventures to the flaming brazier in the courtyard of the house of Caiaphas, warming himself in that cold dawn, while the long false examination goes on, to find if possible a cause for death. Silent before His judges the Master stands. What had He to say to priests who made clean the outside of cup and platter, and forgot the great commandment of the Law? The chattering women point out the northern peasant. What is he doing there—trying to

rescue the prisoner who made a riot in the Temple, or only hoping to bear witness for Him? Surely this is the man who drew a sword against the high priest's servant. "I do not understand," says Peter. "Out on thee, Galilean, the brogue of Galilee betrays thee." Then Peter swore he never knew the prisoner at all. And the kind eyes turned on him with a last sad smile; and the cock crew, and Peter wept.

Pilate must judge, because the Sanhedrin no longer could doom even a blasphemer to death. But Pilate is sore troubled between his fears of riot and his fears of priestly fanatics. How to escape this new duty, and leave the blame on Caiaphas, if any question is asked in Rome? Best to release Him as a gracious concession at the feast-time. But none will have Him, because they counted on saving Barabbas—the Zealot who had murdered so many of the heathen, even if he stole their money for himself. Then Antipas was here for Passover, and after all the prisoner came from Galilee. But Antipas is equally frightened at taking any part in such a cause. The prisoner stands before the

curule chair, and answers nothing. What had He in common with the creature of Sejanus, who shuffled as best he could to shift his duty on to other shoulders? But was this Carpenter of Nazareth to teach truth to him who had listened to Seneca; and held with Sejanus that only the Epicureans were worthy of mention: that none knew truth; that careless gods had left their creatures alone: that only ambition and money were realities? Nothing was left but to wash his hands of all the trouble. Not to approve and not to prevent. Caiaphas must bear the blame if needful; and the fierce shout of the mob takes all the shame away from Pilate, "His blood be on us and on our children." Yet Pilate never sees in fancy that dark Alpine lake to which, a few years hence, despair and baffled ambition will lead him, rather than to his sunny Capuan villa. Caiaphas and his mob do not foresee that day of blood and fire, in which even the Temple is about to perish.

Crowned now with thorns, sceptred with a broken reed, robed in the purple that Rome has already disgraced, He is mocked

by burly Gauls and insolent Romans, whose children yet will suffer death for His name. Driven along the rough streets, to that grim cliff which stands hard by, without the gate, He is crucified thereon with thieves. Through the dark mists loom those three naked forms shuddering with cold, and watched by guards to keep the jeering mob away. And in the darkness comes the last sad cry: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Failure and shameful death. "Thank Jupiter—if any Jupiter there be," thinks Pilate, "the crisis has been cleverly managed." "Praise be to Adonai," says Caiaphas, "the fanatic will now be forgotten." But see, the new sun rises, and smites that cross, and its long shadow creeps across the western sea. The arms stretch out to Greece and Egypt, to Italy and Carthage, to Spain and Gaul and Britain, and wherever that story of the cross is told men know how great a crime was wrought on Calvary, and hear a voice for ever echoing in their ears—"Remember Me."

X.

REBELS.

ONLY forty years ere retribution came. Pilate was disgraced because of riots about aqueducts. For four years another Herodian ruled: then seven Procurators within twenty years—nearly all bad, and the last the worst of all. But Jews had patience till Florus came.

Agrippa, son of Mariamne's younger son Aristobulus, was only six when his young father was strangled by Herod. His mother's friends in Rome had brought him up with Drusus, son of Tiberius, and sent him back to Antipas an educated Roman, but Edomite by birth, save for that strain of Hebrew blood which he inherited from

Mariamne. His strange adventures placed him in a dungeon and on a throne; but the man was dissolute and careless, and ruled as king for only five years in all. Flying at first from debt, he found himself once more a favourite in Rome, and then was flung into prison for careless words as to the Emperor's death. It was here, says tradition, that he saw the owl, which was the harbinger not of his own death as he feared, but of the tyrant's death in Capri. Taken from his chains, he was made by Caius a tetrarch in Bashan, and a king; and the Senate made him a prætor. When the new Emperor decreed that his statues should stand in the house of Jehovah, Agrippa gained the love of the nation by persuading Caius to cancel his order. When Caius was murdered, and the insolent prætorians placed stupid Claudius on the throne of the world, as though in jest, Agrippa's kingdom was enlarged. The Jews had not forgotten Mariamne, and welcomed her grandchild. He stood in the temple court to read the law—as kings were bound to do—and wept, it is said, because of the

words that only a Hebrew might reign over Israel. But the people comforted him: "Take courage, O Agrippa, thou art our brother."

But one brought up in Rome was not a Jew at heart. In Syria he lavished money for the public games, when seven hundred gladiators fought seven hundred criminals before Greek and Phœnician crowds. Scarce were the days of prosperity opening when behold the little owl again appeared, and Agrippa died suddenly in the midst of his glory. His son—a second Agrippa—ruled only in Bashan; and Felix, the slave and pandar, who had married three queens, misruled Judæa as Procurator for eight years. Festus, an upright governor, held office only two years; Albinus, a rapacious tyrant, only one; and then came Florus, who brought ruin on the land—a favourite of Poppæa, and appointed by Nero.

How indeed could men expect anything save wickedness and trouble, when such a master held supreme power in Rome—the vain and cruel man with yellow curls, who could not trouble himself to rule the world,

but was happy when flattered, by favourites who admired his miserable verses, and jockeys who extolled his driving of chariots. It took Vespasian three years to undo the evil that Nero and Florus wrought, and to win back with slaughter the rebellious province of Syria.

But before Pilate fell another martyr was done to death by priests—the first who died for Jesus of Nazareth. Upon the rock of Calvary we see a lean bent figure seated, to watch with fiery eyes the victim stoned by a Jewish mob below. Brought up at Tarsus beside the foaming Cydnus, by humble parents whose ambition it was to see their boy a famous rabbi, he learned bad Greek, and heard the Greek philosophers of the Tarsus academy talking together, in the markets, of Plato and the poets. But in the Jewish school he learned the Law and its commentary. He had sat at the feet of Gamaliel in the Temple; and he was now the hope and pride of all the Pharisees. See how he hastens on the weary journey to Damascus, where some of these new heretics are creating scandal in the synagogue. No

doubt they also soon will meet the fate of Stephen. Already over the dusty plain he sees afar the gardens and the temples of that prosperous city, yet cannot shut his eyes against that pale victim whose looks are turned upward as he prays for those who stoned him. Nor may he close his ears to that low voice which asks him, "Paul, Paul, for what cause dost thou persecute Me?"

See him now disputing in the synagogue, and proving with rabbinic logic the great mistake of Israel. Hunted from city to city, by Antioch to Cyprus, and over all the barren downs of Phrygia, back to Tarsus. Cast out of synagogues, beaten and stoned, but never more doubting his mission to convince, by learning such as no poor fisher of Galilee could boast. Everywhere leaving behind him a small society of what were known among the Greeks as Christians. Never forgetting them, and writing long epistles to direct and teach them. Crossing to Greece, and speaking in Athens to a curious population, who only recognised a new school, half-Greek, half-Jewish, teaching

things of no great novelty to them. His friends are only humble makers of tents and carpets, some of whom have left for Rome. At Ephesus he finds a centre of heathen superstition, with pilgrims from all countries gathered in the painted temple, before the shrine of that black stone which fell from heaven, and of Cybele with her hundred breasts. Jew and pagan alike rise to expel him, and the great mob confirms its own beliefs, shouting for hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" He stands before Seneca's brother—the philosophic Roman who cared for none of these rabbinic quarrels. He hastens to Jerusalem to talk with James and Peter, and finds his former teachers bitter against him, as a renegade accused of bringing Greeks within the forbidden barriers of the Temple. He owes his life to Roman guards, and in the dungeon of Cæsarea that stormy soul pines month after month, hearing the winter breakers thunder on his prison walls.

At length the young Agrippa comes, with honest Festus, and Paul is brought before the courtly Edomite, and his too fond

sister, unhappy Berenice. He claims his right as Roman citizen, and to Rome he shall go. Over the wintry sea in the foul galley, where slaves tug their oars in chains, and the task-master runs along the plank to flog them to their work. Drifting in storms, cast on the rocky shores of Malta, at length he sees afar the Imperial city, and finds peace in its ghetto, among the miserable crowd of hucksters and sellers of magic charms, the lowest scum of fallen Israel—and so is lost to our sight.

Then the great fire breaks out, while Nero is intent only on third-rate verses; and out of fourteen quarters four only escape, and three are utterly wasted. The venerable temples; the trophies of Phœnician wars, and of triumphs over Gauls; the treasures of Greek art; the wooden shrines and houses of the older town, are swept away; and maddened mobs cry for the blood of those who are enemies of Cæsar and of all mankind—haunters of catacombs, feeding on the flesh of murdered babies, commonly known as Christians, whose teacher was executed under Tiberius. They were dragged

from the darkness of their winding passages: nailed to crosses; sewn in the skins of beasts, to be worried by dogs; smeared with pitch and lighted up as torches in Nero's garden, while the Emperor honoured the sports, by mixing with the multitude, dressed as a jockey, and racing in the chariots. Even the bitter Roman chronicler, who hated them as Jews, could not but pity them, as victims of a jealous tyrant; but Nero's aim was accomplished, and the suspicions levelled against himself were forgotten. Perhaps among these martyrs Paul also perished, when once again the heresy seemed to be crushed for ever.

But four years later the tyranny of Florus, in whose time any robber might murder if Florus had his share of the spoil, when whole cities were sacked to enrich him, and all their citizens massacred, had brought about a desperate revolt, and lost Judæa to the empire. Vespasian, the rough soldier who alone could save the State, landed at Accho with sixty thousand troops. Titus his son marched up to meet

him. Slowly and with prudence they advanced, reducing Galilee and Gilead, and coming up from north and east and west to surround the fated city. The brazen helmets are seen among the olives to the north, just when Jerusalem is crowded for the Passover, and filled with factions, with Edomites and Zealots, murderers and robbers. The first wall falls, the Castle of Antonia is ruined. Month after month, until the burning sun of August smites down on a city perishing with thirst and famine, the siege goes on. The Temple cloisters are in flames, the great battering-rams thunder against the golden gates. The daily sacrifice fails—never more to be offered. The tower gate to the north is ruined, and thousands perish round the altar, when the court runs red, not with the blood of bulls and goats, but with that of human victims. Palaces and archives crumble in flames, and at length nothing is left of Herod's city, except one tower for a garrison rising from ruined walls. The resistless Titus enters even the desert, and the last Zealots perish on the rocky plateau of

Herod's fortress at Masada. The golden lamp, the golden table, the trumpets of the Jubilee, are borne in triumph through the streets of Rome. The Jews are slain in theatres of Cæsarea, as sport for heathen crowds. Truly His blood is upon them and on their children, as they die on Calvary and round the walls of Zion, until there are no more crosses for the bodies, nor room to raise them in.

And henceforth the emblem of Israel is that terrible wandering Jew, who comes back each year to Calvary to hear a voice which bids him journey on. Hated and wronged, he is driven from land to land, he sees empires rise and fall, and creeds built up and destroyed. He never dies and never rests; but everywhere is forced to see before him the sad procession of the thorn-crowned Messiah, on his way to Calvary—the friend whom Israel despised and rejected, and whose blood they called upon their heads at the bidding of their priests.

But who are these who have escaped the tragedy of Israel, and gather at Pella

near Gadara in a far corner of the valley of Jordan? They are a small community of peaceful villagers, who till the land, and pay their taxes to the Romans. They are known as Nazarenes; and lovingly preserve the memory and teaching of the prophet of Galilee. They are said to celebrate certain mysteries at night only known to themselves; but they are friendly to all, and never accused of any crime. They even renounce the blood-feud against those who have murdered any of their brethren; and they seek to persuade others—whether Jew or Greek, Roman or barbarian—to join them, and to promise to abandon the sins of the age,—the sacrifice of children among the Arabs, the infanticide and other abominations of the towns, and the degrading superstitions to which the peasantry adhere, and which soothsayers and Jewish astrologers spread among them.

At times they are found on the river banks, where they baptise new converts, or their younger brethren, who are dipped in the stream and blessed by the elder. On every Sabbath night they gather in a

room, where a simple feast of bread and wine, cheese and fruits, is prepared. The meeting is strictly private, and even secret; but their hymns have been heard, and the voice of the reader, or of the elder who prays. The Roman governor tolerates them because they are peaceable subjects, although they have not been enrolled among the licensed clubs of the empire. They often receive letters from other like communities, in Antioch and Asia Minor, and even from Rome; and some of the brothers and kinsmen of their prophet are said to be among their elders. They hold it duty to "visit the widows and fatherless in their affliction, and to keep themselves unspotted from the world."

If we could enter that humble room, and join the little company of men and women who have saluted each other with the kiss of peace, in the dark chamber lighted only by the Sabbath lamp, we should see the elder breaking bread, and blessing the wine-cup, giving thanks for these gifts to God, and praying that, as the corn on the mountains was gathered to

make one loaf, so might all the churches in the last day be gathered together. Giving thanks also for the Vine of David, for the light and immortality made known through Jesus the servant of God. We should see the ministers taking portions to all the guests, and even to the sick in their homes, and bringing round the cup of wine and water, that all may drink together, in remembrance of that Last Supper in Jerusalem—a symbol of their Master's Passion. The elder gathers their poor donations for those who are poorer yet. The Hebrew prophets, and the teaching of their own apostles, are read aloud, and the ancient psalms of Israel are sung; but the Gentile is not held by them to be an outcast because of foreign race, and the message is for all who will believe and lead a better life. They are waiting but a little while, till the great day shall come, when the Messiah shall appear at the end of the world, and the faithful shall be caught up to the clouds to meet him, or rise from their rocky sepulchres which line the cliffs.

Thus they lived and so they died, as the centuries rolled on and the Roman Empire changed and fell into decay. If we could believe the legend that such Nazarenes fled from the Decian persecution, more than two hundred years after the day of Calvary, to a cave near Ephesus, and slept there for two centuries more, we might ask what was it that was seen by one of them — Jamblicus — who woke and went down to the city, to offer his copper penny, stamped with the name of Decius, for bread, and found a new world, new speech he could not understand, and new mysterious rites and symbols? It was towards the closing years of Theodosius the younger, Emperor of the East, that he awoke. The Christian Goths had sacked Christian Rome: the Christian Vandals had entered Christian Carthage; and Attila, the flat-nosed, black-eyed Mongol, of short stout figure and savage energy, dictates to east and west alike. His Huns have waked the careless citizens of Antioch from their pleasant rest, and have spread fear through Palestine also, even as far as Egypt; but Ephesus is

now at peace because the Huns have been satisfied with their bribes.

What is this great basilica that rises in the city, adorned with precious marbles and gold? Not Diana's temple, for that the Gauls had ruined after Jamblicus fell asleep. Its walls are covered with mosaic pictures, very inferior as works of art to the old statues of Greece. He cannot read the legends written by the figures — "Holy Peter," "Holy Paul," "Holy Athanasius," "The Mother of God." But see, it has an altar, with bread offerings, and a cup, and a golden candlestick upon it, and a crystal box containing bits of human bones and teeth. There are crosses on the walls, and some of the pictures are blackened by kisses of the worshippers. There is a smell of incense in this dark pillared hall, with its curtains drawn from the apse to the east. There are *ex voto* emblems, of legs and arms and eyes and breasts, hanging from the pillars; and crowned priests are chanting in Greek the ritual of the god.

Paganism is not dead, only its forms are changed. Mithra, it would seem—so popu-

lar in Rome—has replaced Jupiter, and Isis has taken the shrine of Diana. It is all one: for call him Baal or Zeus or Peter, call her Ashtoreth or Diana or Mary, wherever these images are set up a superstitious worship of them surely follows. Jamblicus, however, tries to make out from one near him something of the new heathenism that has entered Ephesus. “Most respectable lord,” says the Greek, “we are not filthy Manicheans, we are not accursed Arians, we are not vile Ebionites or Nazarenes, we are the orthodox. We have the arm of St George, and the blood of St Euphemia. We have even a fragment of the true cross. We have the relics of the holy martyrs, and the miraculous icons. We are the true followers of the most holy Athanasius. We believe in the Homoousion, and in the perpetual virginity of the Mother of God.”

Jamblicus did not understand. The story says that he went back to his cave and died. And thus the last Nazarene died; but the orthodox triumphed and waxed rich.

Could he have witnessed later what happened in Rome itself, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries after the day of Calvary, he would have seen in Italy religion itself dead and forgotten. Infidel cardinals trembled before the bastards of a pope. The Borgias put their poisons even in the sacred chalice. Priests sold in the open market pardons for murder, parricide, and incest. But among the free peoples of Germany and Britain men's consciences were shocked by the cynical disbelief of Latin races. Luther arose and freed them from the Pope, and brought out the Scriptures hidden in long-forgotten languages; and the "new learning" offered them in the vulgar tongue to all. They were once more to be "understood of the people."

But what has the new learning done with them now? It has torn them in pieces. It has picked them into little bits, and labelled them E and J and D and H and P. A new ritual, taken from that of mediæval Rome, has revived the ancient superstition, and priests forget the great com-

mandment while, like the Jews, they are intent on washing cups and platters. Men have laughed with Voltaire; have scorned the "mistakes of Moses"; have set up a new philosophy, teaching as religion the little that man can know of heaven and earth. Do they know more than Job did of the mystery of death? Have they forgotten that men, like purblind ants, crawl at the feet of a giant form, and cannot see its majesty, and suppose it to be only a mountain of stone? They have laid to the charge of Jesus of Nazareth the deceits of Jesuits, the crimes of pagan popes, the horrors of the Inquisition, the follies of fanatics. Yet the spirit of the ancient prophets is not dead, and the parables of Galilee remain what they were.

If we possess some spirit of ruth and pity unknown to the Romans of the empire; if men's lives are somewhat cleaner than they were; if there is compassion for the poor and weak; if we are more ashamed of usury and war than of old; if we are striving to increase happiness, and to purify justice,—to whom is this due?

There are some who say, "The good Lord Jesus has had his day."

"Had? has it come? It has only dawned.

It will come by-and-by.

O how could I serve in the wards,

If the hope of the world were a lie?"

So wherever we see the greatest commandment had in remembrance, we see also, standing high above the struggling crowd, that figure with the auburn locks and kind brown eyes, crowned with a crown of thorns, with hands and feet pierced by nails of the Cross; and we hear again the gentle voice that says, "Remember Me."

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